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COMRADES IN COURAGE

ANTOINE REDIER



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COMRADES IN COURAGE

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COMRADES IN COURAGE

(*Méditations Dans La Tranchée*)

BY

LIEUTENANT ANTOINE REDIER

TRANSLATED BY

MRS. PHILIP DUNCAN WILSON



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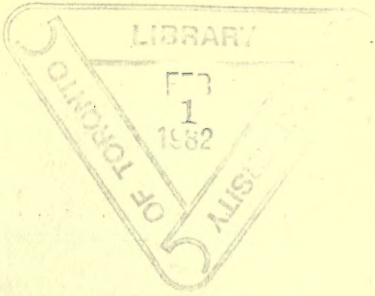
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TO

MY SONS

SO THAT WHEN THEY ARE GROWN
THEY MAY BE

HONOURABLE MEN
STRONG, FREE, AND BRAVE

A. R.

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COMRADES IN COURAGE

COMRADES IN COURAGE

I

Duty

NEVER in all my life have I heard so many foolish words, nor myself said so many useless things, as I have since my sojourn in the trenches. The great danger in which we live forces us to seek distraction and we are always striving for entertainment. At times my brain reels from giddiness, I take my head between my hands and anxiously ask myself: "What am I doing here for the profit of my soul?"

I am serving my country, it is true. I am occupying my appointed place. If I should be killed I shall have done my whole duty. But how if I survive? Shall I have passed through these solemn moments of world history without improvement to myself? We are the witnesses and the actors in one of the great dramas of hu-

manity. In later years many will envy us, and perhaps our children will think of us as Titans. Yet thoughtlessly we tramp these fields of carnage which later will become the goal of pious pilgrimages. We are like our little neighbours, the larks, that continue their joyous songs without regard for the war. Our sole concession to the moment is that occasionally we lower our voices if the enemy, who watches opposite, be near enough to hear.

Some people will say that this lightheartedness in the face of danger is a sign of heroism. This is not true. We are able to distract ourselves. We could not endure our existence if we lacked this precious gift of forgetting. But if we have learned to shut our eyes at certain times, there are other times when it is necessary to look with all our power. When the war emerges from its present stagnation of trench life, we will joyfully look ahead of us. To-day our bodies are fast stuck in the mud, and, unless we take care, our souls will fall asleep.

To-night I have tried to stimulate mine a little by meditation. I meditated upon death, and then upon duty. I could easily

have considered glory, but in the face of facts it would have seemed like seducing myself with bright words. Out here we are exposed every moment to the possibility of a glorious death, but nevertheless it *is* death; and if, after the war, there remains an imprint upon my being, it will be chiefly this tragic menace which will have put it there.

What does it mean to die on the field of honour? Yesterday a poor fellow whom I myself had seen wounded, gave up his soul at the field hospital. The day before, while his wound was being dressed, he was asked by the doctor how he felt. He replied, with his Flemish accent: "*Min vinte*" (*mon ventre*, my stomach), "my lieutenant."

"What's the matter with your stomach?"

"I have a pain in my stomach."

His plaintive voice, his childish accent will dwell long in my memory. How sad it was that he should die, a man of nearly forty and the father of a family. His people live in the invaded provinces and cannot learn of their loss until we have the requisite means and time for communicating with them. As he lay dying he did not think of himself as a hero, but as a poor

devil. He did not go to war for the sake of glory. He was merely a unit in the mass, and had scarcely seen the enemy with his own eyes, yet he lived for months passively awaiting an obscure end. His heroism consisted in accepting his destiny with resignation.

We are all like this man. Death upon the field of battle is always a horrible adventure. Those of us who have been in the campaign since the beginning have seen it too often close at hand to seek it carelessly with the joyful light-heartedness of that first month of August. There are too many bodies heaped on the ground before our trenches. We know of too many wrecked and ruined homes. We have lost too many good comrades who still lack a grave—and always will.

We are told that the Japanese and Serbians disdain death. I cannot understand their mental processes. We are made in a different manner, perhaps because our mode of life is too easy. Personally, I am unable to conceive that one goes to martyrdom willingly. Indeed even the greatest martyrs have not succeeded in concealing their suffering and were not ashamed to call

heaven to help them in their weakness. Yet no one doubts that the quality of their hearts was superior to that of most of ours. The radiant compensation which God offers a believer is not the same that our country holds forth to a soldier who makes the supreme sacrifice for her. The shirkers seek employment at the rear or attempt to conceal themselves in the military depots and they are constantly haunted by the fear of the pitiless death which awaits them on the battlefield. On the other hand, those who have gone to the front voluntarily, or because it was their turn, cover their eyes, and their flesh creeps when they realize the cruel end before them, but like heroes they go forward unfalteringly.

Is it glory that they seek? I do not believe so. Yet I am acquainted with one exception. The other day I saw him when he paid a visit to some comrades. We were gathered in a little dug-out and were delighted to see one another. After conversing and joking a bit we began to sing—first some very French songs, and then someone hummed "*Die Wacht am Rhein.*" We were startled. We hear them sing it opposite in the German trenches every

evening. Certainly the refrain is grave and melodious, but how sad. How widely our race—so alert and frank—is separated from theirs, which dreams and laments.

Finally came the turn of my young friend to sing. He hesitated, embarrassed, and in spite of his splendid soldierly figure, blushed through his tan. The grandson, son, nephew, and god-son of celebrated French soldiers and sailors, the declaration of war had found him at Saint-Cyr. He had chosen the cavalry as his branch, but, after the first few battles, he saw that in this war the cavalry would remain at the rear, at least for some time. He therefore asked and obtained consent to leave his chosen branch, and joined the infantry. It is in this miserable hole that he awaits the moment of his sacrifice.

I do not know who is the author of the following sonnet, but it is known without exception to all the students of Saint-Cyr. We were deeply moved by hearing this handsome son of France sing it so fervently. His eyes were dilated and he did not appear the same warrior as the others, but a young god transfigured by a celestial vision.

LA GLOIRE

Voulant voir si l'école était bien digne d'elle,
La Gloire, un jour, du ciel descendit à Saint-Cyr.
On l'y connaissait bien! Ce fut avec plaisir
Que les Saint-Cyriens reçurent l'Immortelle.

Elle les trouva forts. Ils la trouvèrent belle.
Après un jour de fête, avant de repartir,
La Gloire, a tous voulant laisser un souvenir,

Fixa sur leur schako des plumes de son aile.
Et l'on porta longtemps le plumet radieux.
Mais un soir de combat, près de fermer les yeux,
Un Saint-Cyrien, mourant, le mit sur sa blessure

Pour lui donner aussi le baptême du sang.
Et, depuis, nous portons—admirable parure—
Sur notre schako bleu, le plumet rouge et blanc.

Any man who can sing thus is not disturbed by thoughts of death. He loves glory for itself and he has deliberately dedicated his life to it. It is of no importance to him that the sacrifice the Motherland demands of her sons is a merciless one. He has reached the age when one begins to

ponder on human destiny and meets it in a defiant attitude, be it good or bad. He is able to sacrifice his life freely because he has not yet contracted life's responsibilities.

The blood which I find on my hands when I help raise the wounded, or aid the dying, is to me cruel and ghastly. To him it is the vermilion blood of heroes of which the poets sing. He bathes a plume in it and with exaltation wears it on his helmet as a token. Unlike him I cannot love glory for itself. My business here is the glory of France. I work for it with all my strength but I do not seek it for myself. My aim in the war is to do my duty. Save for rare exceptions we do not go valiantly to death either because we disdain it, or for the laurels that will be thrown on our tombs. We go in the spirit of discipline, because it is our duty. The first fruit of this slaughter has been to give us the long-forgotten knowledge of—and desire to do—our duty. The great miracle has happened which we so anxiously awaited during the uneasy years that preceded the war.

The other day as we lounged in our cave, we were aroused by the brusque entrance

of an *adjudant** who pushed before him two soldiers, one of whom was wiping his bleeding face with a handkerchief.

"Wounded?"

"Nothing like it, Captain. They were fighting and I brought them to the post to explain."

The man with the bleeding face is what is known as a village lawyer. It seems that he had said that the "*Boches*" were as good as the French—at which the other had attacked him. The assailant stands motionless. He is penitent, but his fist was well aimed and he is proud that the blow does credit to his strength. He feels vaguely that, in the war, strength is of great value. He admits his crime and only says in excuse:

"He is always bothering us with his theories. I wanted to give him a lesson and didn't think that a single punch would hurt him."

"Did you intend to give him several?"

"I only intended to make him shut up, sir."

At this the other man takes a step forward:

*The French "*adjudant*" corresponds to a first sergeant in the American Army.

"I'd like to see you make me shut up!"

He is a queer figure of a man. His face is thin and already shows the traces of age. His figure is frail and bowed, his manner abject but cunning, and he talks in a pretentious tone with many gestures:

"A man ought to have rights, even here."

"You have the right to kill a Boche, old grandmother!"

"Be silent; you struck him. Let him speak."

"My Captain," begins the other, "if you let these young fellows act like this, it means a revolution in the trenches. At least, I can understand that we ought not to quarrel because, after all, we are here only to share the same miserable fate."

"We are here for France," the adjudant cries at him, rolling his eyes in a terrible manner.

"Come," says the Captain, wishing to close the incident, "shake hands and go back to your places."

As the men go out I turn curiously toward the adjudant who will not permit anybody to say that his lot here is a miserable one.

"You have been hard on the old man."

"It is his own fault if I have. I know

these lawyers, they are always thinking of their rights, never of their duties."

He goes on with his theme, enlarging the scope of his discussion. He paints for us in bold but truthful colours a picture of average French society in the villages and country-side before the war. Although, in peace time, a man of humble situation, a modest shopkeeper on the public square of a small county-seat, his observation and judgment are excellent. His type demonstrates how well true wisdom will always be preserved among the common people. After escaping the snares of life, morality to them is represented by what they remember of their early religious instruction.

He goes on to tell how these heroes, who to-day are ready to die with a firm heart, faced duty as civilians in time of peace. His exact words are not necessary; his meaning will suffice.

First he tells us the programme for an honest man of the working class in the cities: Know your craft well enough to do it with pleasure; have simple tastes that you may be able to satisfy them fully; raise good children in the affection of whom you may find a refuge in the great hours of life.

Our citizens, however, have substituted what they consider a better programme: Work as little as possible because it is fatiguing; on the other hand, demand as high wages as possible because it is good to feel the coins jingling in one's pocket. Spend your money upon yourself alone and, for that reason, have no children. Insist upon your right to live your own life, to seek pleasure always, to loaf and to spoil everything, including your work, yourself, your family, and your country. As for duty, don't consider it!

Second, the country people: they are still economical and hard working like their fathers, but with a greed which in them takes the place of every virtue. Unlike true sons of the soil they are incapable of working for the sake of posterity and, for example, never plant trees because the profit to be derived from them is too distant. On the contrary, they cut down those planted by their ancestors in order that their children may have money to spend in the city. They have neither religious faith nor respect for womanhood. They never sit down for a moment of quiet rest at home. They are simply beasts of burden, and if you talk

of duty, these born slaves who voluntarily accept the vilest servitude, will laugh sarcastically and tell you that they are free men and do not want to be bound by moral laws.

Of the upper classes, represented to him by his officers, our critic says nothing, but it is easy for me to continue his thought. Aristocrats, bourgeois, people of position, all those that we arbitrarily call the governing class, what is their real value? The majority of the men are pleasure-seekers, elbowing themselves forward in search of some slight advantage, and the women merely dolls. The former gain wealth, it does not matter how, and their companions dissipate it in thin air. When it becomes a question of public good, toward which they should have the most sacred ideas of duty since it concerns everybody, one finds these people either utterly indifferent or calculating. It is proverbial that the masses never elevate the wisest to power. With us at times it seems as if they actually chose the least worthy in order to prevent domination. To be sure one gets a servant of the people in this fashion, but it is our country that pays.

Come, join me in the trenches and then look at these workmen, these country people, these middle- and upper-class men. There they stand in front of us, gun in hand, half buried in the mud. This time they are doing their duty, and all of them at the same time. What are they thinking about? The war has changed them profoundly. It has made good soldiers of them as well as good men. Will the miracle last forever?

The adjudant says yes. I do not agree. I do not think that we shall necessarily be better when we return to our homes, but I think we shall be in a condition to become better, that is the important thing. Force has restored to us the right notion of duty. It has not yet definitely established us in the habit of well doing, but it will make us apt to follow if we are shown new ways. The eternal truths will be explained by new masters. Prophets will raise themselves against the preachers of revolution and the doctrines of the sovereign rights of the individual, and this time their voices will be heard. These intellectual leaders of a wiser France exist at present, but they are almost alone in the desert. The war will

have increased the courage and power of those who survive. My vision pierces the walls of this trench shelter in which I sit, and I perceive in the distance the era that is coming, when they will find willing listeners, not only among the intellectual élite—a majority of whom has already been with them for a long time—but even in the hearts of our most distant villagers.

It is the same with people as with children. It does not suffice to show them the right path, it is necessary actually to lead them by the hand. Precepts without the proof of experience are vain. After the harsh trials of this war the lessons of the wise will be understood. We shall have weighed in particular the worth of two words, until now very unjustly valued. Formerly we wrote the word "Duty" with a capital, but contented ourselves with its abstract contemplation. On the other hand, we claimed an enormous number of rights. The war has taught us to reverse these words. I recognize in "Right" our safeguard against all, but I see before me each day—each hour—an enormous number of duties.

Right and duty, if we are able to neglect

reality itself—that is to say human frailties and weaknesses—would be deserving of equal honour, for they correspond and link together naturally. But in fact the word "right" is a dangerous word, full of temptation and injustice when put in the mouths of the masses. Here among us it has been put to flight by the whistle of the shells.

Indeed there is no doctrine of social revolution, no fomenter of disorder and trouble, which does not find contradiction each day in our trenches. For example: equality, that renowned right of each to be equal to everyone else, the attainment of which is often accomplished only by envy, hatred, and destruction of everything. Here in the field, concerning equality we only know our common wretchedness in meeting death, which unceasingly strikes without regard to rank or worth. If you are jealous of your fellowmen, if you desire to be treated equally with them, come up here to this "fire-trench" where injustice is unknown, where no one is too proud to seek protection when he hears the whistle of an approaching shell, where the most that anyone can offer is a few inches of mortal flesh to the German

lead. Equality under fire? Surely; but for the rest, each man has a different rank, according to his merit. It is necessary to send out a party for patrol to-night. Who will volunteer? Ten men step forward. From that moment these men are the acknowledged superiors of the others in the ranks. Inequality, Respect; two new ideas to our people, but we will accustom ourselves to them.

In civil life one may obtain almost every privilege by the power of money. Here at the front money is of no value. The prestige of glory has replaced that of gold. Admiration of others, which elevates the soul, has been substituted for envy which degrades it. The divine joys and honours to be gained from the war are proportionate to the degree of individual valour, intelligence, physical strength, devotion, and heroism. According to your merit you will win these rewards amidst the ungrudging applause of your comrades. The same men who, in the democracy of peace, were at one another's throats, here become comrades in the fray. Loyalty, good humour, and confidence have been reëstablished by the brotherhood of arms. Laughter, that splen-

did sign of physical and moral health, reigns supreme amidst all the degrees of the regimental hierarchy. Hatred subsides, and even religion receives the homage that is its due.

It is as if a magic wand had been used to set everything right. Formerly we were surfeited with sensations, and our chief forces were expended in the pursuit of pleasure. Now the best part of our time is spent in digging ditches, no matter whether it rain or shine, and the sole privilege accorded us is that we may choose either a pick which loosens the earth, or a shovel which throws it aside. Previously we needed a thousand comforts, yet now, for so many months that we can hardly remember the number, we have slept with the mice, either upon bare ground or straw. Best of all, we do it with a song upon our lips, and when the hour comes for repose we enjoy triumphant slumbers.

In reviving national hatred, the enemy has united both our living and our dead. Tradition, which formerly was ridiculed, has taken for us a new grandeur and beauty. Republican ministers, who formerly remembered the history of France no further

back than 1793, since the war, have repeatedly and solemnly inspired their listeners by calling upon such monarchical names as Saint-Louis, Du Guesclin, and Jeanne d'Arc. We used to mock at authority, order and discipline, but since the outbreak of the war we have seen that Germany, with the aid of these same instruments, almost succeeded in defeating us. Now we have the satisfaction that comes from doing our duty. The duty is an evident one and we enjoy the sensation of seeing our way clearly. In fulfilling our glorious mission we find such joys that we wish to publish them to the winds.

What shall we say when we return to our homes after the war? Some will be disagreeable boasters. Others will be more modest, but nevertheless will desire that the trials they have borne so valiantly be appreciated at their true value and that no one dispute the character and the beauty of their sacrifice. Inculcated with the supreme value of devotion to their country, they will insist that those about them profess the same cult. They will demand praise, not for themselves, but for the virtues they have practised, and



this will make two or three million instructors in duty in our towns and villages.

So all of us who daily look upon the face of Death and school ourselves to regard its redoubtable figure unwinkingly; all of us who survive, will return from the field of honour with the habitude and pride of service.

Assuredly duties will not be so simple in time of peace as in time of war. We shall often find them even more difficult on account of their obscurity. We shall be assisted at that time by the wonderful recollections of our days of glory. One does not always adopt heroism with good grace, for it implies not only a passive readiness to accept death, to remain day and night for months under its constant menace, but also the active seeking of it in moments of dreadful violence, approaching it with a song on the lips, and hailing its coming with exaltation—not for the sake of glory but because it is what one ought to do. After all, it does not matter how much of resignation enters into the spirit of willingness in which one makes the sacrifice.

I remember in the month of September, shortly after the Battle of the Marne, a

general came to inspect the regimental depot of the territorial army in the region where I was stationed. His mission was particularly to examine the officers and to obtain an estimate of their spirit. He had left the battlefield where he had just received his promotion to his present rank only a few hours earlier. The fumes of powder still lingered about him. He walked down the line of non-commissioned officers on parade in the courtyard and to each put this question:

"Do you request to be sent to the front?"

"I am ready to go when my turn comes, sir," these warriors invariably replied.

"Bah!" said the great chief. "you speak like cowards."

This remark roused great feeling among those poor devils. They had not comprehended the correct sense of duty in the opportunity that was offered them of contributing in a more active manner to the national safety. The right to await their turn, that was their idea. Little by little these same men have left their "depot," are serving to-day in the trenches, and conducting themselves well. Many times they have gaily endured nameless suffering.

They go where they are told, and reflect no farther. It is not absolutely necessary that the law be understood so long as it is recognized and obeyed. They are the mass and follow their leaders.

Among these leaders I find two types: First, the fiery soldier who is actuated by his love for France. He has an understanding of the different degrees of obligation and, no matter how tenderly he cherishes his home, his country comes first. A certain group of characteristics is common to each member of this class. A man of this type always serves the public interest before his own, even when, unlike the present time, the duty is not such an important one. With such a mentality, a man is always a fervent student of history and politics. He knows the past of his country and reveres all its glories. He seriously considers its present destiny and the men who are its guardians. When war comes it is a personal affair. I love this type, which is common enough, and it is toward it that by nature I most readily incline. I do not feel that I deserve great merit in doing my duty as a soldier, but if it were not for that wonderful vision of France which sustains and ani-

mates me, I think I should be greatly deserving of it. When I hear people say that our frontier will be extended to the Rhine, I am filled with a profound joy as if those lost provinces were to be returned to me in person. Inspired by such thoughts it is not difficult to give my soul to my country, and when it shall be necessary I will also give my body.

I do not know whether the second type is more rare; at any rate, I find it infinitely attractive. Among my companions there is one who personifies it in a charming manner. You may see him sauntering along the trench in his heavy boots, a tall youth with his coat hanging open and an old military cap perched upon a thick shock of flaxen hair. With his abrupt gestures and boisterous manner you would think him too bad a character ever to have become even a corporal. He meets some of the men; I can't hear what he says to them, but they leave him with a hearty burst of laughter. One of them shouts:

"My Lieutenant, you always make us laugh."

Yes, he is a lieutenant, this soldier so young, so thin, so merry. He has even

commanded his company since that sad day in September, 1914, when his captain was killed. His face is pleasingly frank and with a nose as big as was that of Henry IV, and there is a fine down straggling upon his lip. He blushes like a girl, in spite of a fiery voice. His angers are short-lived; he gesticulates, and his laugh is never-ceasing. He is attending to his country's business here with all his heart, but his eyes are not dazzled like mine by the captivating image of France. He sees another more austere to whose cult he devotes his fervour; that of duty. When he left his mother in tears he did not argue about the origin and the consequences of the war, nor was he consoled by the thought of a triumphant revenge; an honest man in all the acts of his life, he was that day honest as usual. The law commanded him to be a soldier; he obeyed and went. The sacrifice was hard, consequently of rare value. Shame to the coward who would attempt to depreciate it.

The men who have come among us, more or less willingly, in the end become accustomed to think like their chiefs. According to his character, each man chooses one or

the other type as his model. They are benefited, so are we, and all is well.

Before the month of August 1914 I often asked myself whether we should ever experience these noble joys which are so necessary to stimulate mankind. The war has brought them all to us.

Behold! I am able to return to the banalities of the present which, as I began this train of thought, made me feel that I was witness to a sacrilege. I can remain carefree even while watching the enemy. I am improving without knowing it and the brave men around me are doing the same. However, should Glory, of whom I ask nothing personally, come some evening of battle to crown one of us with her light, I shall bless the beautiful visitor and ask her to pardon me because to-night in my trench I have preferred, to her radiant face, one graver and less accustomed to the smiles of men: that of duty.

II

The Excavators

"COME, *Monsieur le territorial*, we must hurry!"

It is night, the rain is falling. The commandant brandishes his stick and with it taps the shoulder of a large man who hesitates in front of a ditch. At this stimulus the soldier jumps across and tumbles on the other side, face forward in the mud. Awkwardly he picks up his shovel, his woollen muffler, and his blanket. He struggles to his feet, takes a step, and is at once lost to sight in the darkness. Another follows and takes the same formidable jump.

For a long time I have been watching them from the bottom of the *boyau* which they are crossing. They are a company of territorials from the south of France, the "*Midi*." To-night they are to make a new system of fortifications in front of our

trenches. Already the patrols are out in front, well forward, to protect the working party. A section of engineers has come to trace out and execute the more technical part, the actual excavation will be done by these old men who are slowly and awkwardly trying to jump the ditch under the watchful eye of the commandant.

Commandant V—— is a gallant gentleman and I have no fear that his cane did more than caress the shoulder of that citizen from Béziers. But it is not a moment for gentleness. It is all in the day's work, and the Germans are only a few yards away. It is annoying to have these old men make so much trouble about such a trifle as jumping from one bank of earth to another! But the poor fellows can do no better.

Theirs is a hard duty. What can they do in this young men's war? Renew their youth perhaps. I know some who, in spite of their forty years, have the hearts of adolescents. But others come, dragging limbs which are heavy and numb, and with souls that are fast asleep. Before the war they were living among their vineyards in distant sunlit provinces. Here is one, for example,

who kept a shop and who was comfortably growing prosperous. Here is another who was a man of reputation in his village and who won renown by his skilful play at *manille*.* Now they spend their nights in the mud and their hours of repose on the straw behind the lines. Their work, like that of criminals, commences only when the night has fallen and they never labour by light of day. No more golden wine in tinkling glasses; they now take their liquor at one gulp, shudder, and talk of something else. For tools they have their choice between shovel and pick. To be sure, each one has his gun, but for months it has been of use only as an extra burden upon his back.

To-night I cannot help pitying them a little. The rain is falling in torrents; one can hardly see two paces ahead. I have been able to see their attitudes—funny or pitiful—only because from below the muggy sky forms a background.

But the picture changes, the last territorial has crossed the opening, and I see above me two shadows of a different type. They are the officers wrapped in their

*Manille is a game played with cards.

waterproofs. I recognize the Commandant by his erect figure, his brusque utterance, and his precise gestures. He is speaking in a low tone, but his voice has lost none of its warmth:

"*Mon petit*, do your work quickly, but do it well; and don't forget that I shall be interested in watching you."

I cannot recognize the other, but he seems very young. Suddenly a German star shell shoots up and bursts into light. Doubtless the men exposed in the open have thrown themselves flat on the ground for concealment, but these officers absorbed in their conversation remain standing. I distinguish the features of the second man. His face is thin and clean shaven. Glasses surmount a small, straight nose with smiling lips beneath. Frankness and intelligence are written on his forehead and energy at the point of his chin.

At the sight of this graceful figure I forget for an instant the war and its miseries. I can picture this youth at the annual ball of the *Polytechnique*, extending the courtesies of the school to some pretty Parisienne in exactly the same graceful manner as that with which he now converses with his

chief. As an officer of engineers it is his duty to go out in the open in front of our lines and at the risk of his life, to supervise this work. He is bearing two grave responsibilities which disquiet him much more than the thought of his personal danger: first, the execution of his task and, secondly, the safeguarding of the lives of all those older men.

In speaking of this young officer of whose fate I am ignorant I would like to mention the admiration that we soldiers of the infantry feel for our comrades of the engineers. They form a magnificent branch of the army service; their work is always for others and is accomplished often at the cost of suffering and terrific loss without the redeeming feature of the ability to fight back. They die while bridging a stream that the infantry may push forward in the direction of glory. We boast of being at the front, but they carry the war even in advance of the front. It is useless to classify merit for every man here is doing his best, but these engineer-soldiers are wonderful examples of fearlessness. Their entire army of carpenters, locksmiths, mechanicians, and wheelwrights exercises its various crafts

under fire with admirable deliberation. I would also like that a part of the nation's gratitude should go to those good territorials who, although the post was not one of their seeking, have certainly become the faithful auxiliaries of the engineers.

Trench warfare has condemned us all to the work of digging. We are the foremen of labour gangs and our soldiers merely labourers. Still, we of the active branches of the service have the joy of guarding our pits as soldiers, once these pits are completed. On the other hand, the territorials dig trenches and go away. In the early days of the war entire regiments of the territorial army were employed in the burial of the dead—men and horses. Now they dig ditches for the living. Is it any more pleasant?

To-night they are really having their troubles. It is humiliating to be required to run and jump, fall quickly on one's stomach, and get up without showing one's stiffness when a man is beginning to feel his advancing years. To dig a ditch is one thing, but to get out of it with agility is another. The eyes of these men are no longer like those of boys of twenty, nor are their hearts like those of the youngsters of the class of "15" who

despise death. On such an inky night as this they are uneasy. Where are the Boches? Are they not likely to shoot from such close range? The more youthful soldiers who are doing guard duty guess at their anxieties and have a little sport at their expense:

"You know, old man, this is a pretty dangerous spot!"

"Are they near?"

"Who?"

"The Boches."

"Don't worry about the Boches, they are at least thirty metres from here."

"Thirty metres! Impossible!"

The old man is horrified, but all the same a secret pride takes possession of him. When he goes back home he will be able to say that he has worked within thirty metres of the Germans. Half trembling and half content, he resumes his digging and wallowing in the mud.

As for my men and me, we certainly did not come to fight with shovels, but we have gaily accepted our unexpected destiny. We are in love with duty; we welcome it, no matter what form it takes.

One is surprised, however, to find how

much joy one gets in digging a really good trench. I will tell you about one, a masterpiece, of which we were truly proud. I will try to be modest but without promising to succeed.

We were ordered to trace in front of the trench which my section occupied, a gallery one hundred and fifty metres in length, extending from our line straight toward the Boches. What is it for? That was a mystery. Two days later we were to learn that it was the route for an attack. That evening my mind was obsessed with one idea: to advance a trench one hundred and fifty metres in a perfectly straight line. The words "perfectly straight" amazed me. I ran to the telephone:

"Hello! Commandant, must the line be perfectly straight?"

"Yes, absolutely. Hurry, for you must finish in two nights."

We had, at this point, a completed section of trench forty metres long leading forward to a listening post. After a consultation with my officers we decided to utilize this and extend it one hundred and ten metres farther. We climbed out of the trench and started off toward the German line,

counting the paces. We experienced an emotion different from those we usually feel when out on skirmishing or patrol duty. At such a time a man is waging war, he can use prudence or aggression, can reconnoitre and retreat. This night we were going out into the unknown much as Christopher Columbus went toward America. Only a few days earlier our trenches had been pushed forward and we did not as yet have definite information as to the distance separating us from the enemy. We had the feeling that we might, at any moment, run into his barbed-wire entanglements.

As we advanced, I posted my two companions at different points to make my return easier, and I counted off the last forty paces alone. I had a curious feeling. There was absolutely no noise, and the darkness was so complete that I could not even tell where to place my feet. Suppose the Germans had heard us and prepared an ambuscade! I might run against them or actually tread upon their bodies! When at last I had measured what seemed to me to be the hundred and ten paces, I added two more, either for the sake of my conscience or purely in bravado—I do not

know which—and stuck my cane into the ground.

From that moment this was conquered ground. To win it, it had been necessary to master an emotion. All of us would now be able to walk along this line without a thought of danger. That danger still existed, still was great, but no longer would we be conscious of it.

But how were we to make our line straight? You would doubtless say: Stretch a cord and follow it. The problem, however, was not so simple. Forty metres of our line were already traced and dug. If my cord commenced at the end of this completed portion I would have two straight elements, but they would almost certainly be angulated at their junction. You would then perhaps tell me to start my cord near the beginning of the completed trench. Wise words, but my cord was too short! I had never studied surveying but had often seen the red-and-white stakes used in that work. Surveyors place two stakes in the desired direction and then project a third one by sighting over the two already placed. A long line may be made quite as straight in this manner as with the best-stretched cord.

I had no stakes, but I had men who might be substituted for them. My eye could not pierce 110 metres of the inky darkness, but I was able to see two paces ahead. I therefore posted some men two paces apart and in a line which pointed in the right direction. By lying down and looking upward, with the sky as a background, I could see a part of the line which their motionless figures made. When this was absolutely straight, two men ran along to the right and left of the file and marked the two sides of the trench. In this way the line was completed, and the work of excavation begun.

It is in times like these that one gets an insight into the characters of the men. For the most advanced positions we called for volunteers. These were the best workers. Farther back one found the slackers who were continually resting with their arms crossed on the handles of their spades. Those who were afraid showed it by commencing to dig furiously the moment they had reached their assigned position in order to make a hole to shelter themselves. Once protected, their ardour slackened visibly, for they knew that when they had finished their portion they would be asked to recommence

farther forward and thus expose their precious skin anew. Finally there were the talkative ones whom even proximity to the Germans could not repress:

"My old woman would have a fright if she could see me here!"

"Keep quiet."

"What's the matter? You don't think I am afraid of the Boches, do you?"

"Shut up, I tell you."

"It would take more than them to scare me."

It is no use trying to stop that good fellow. He says something, spits on his hands, says something more, and so on. Little by little, while he chatters and works, the trench takes shape, deepens, and is finished. Let them send up as many illuminating rockets as they please, we no longer have to bend forward to conceal ourselves and the trick is won.

At 2 A. M. I sent my men off to lie down, but I remained waiting for daybreak. I wished to know whether my line was straight. I found one of my sergeants had also remained and was busily examining the trench.

"Why did you stay?" I asked him.

"For no special reason."

"Did you want to see whether the trench was straight?"

"Perhaps, sir."

He was a big youth of the tenacious type. He had been working on this trench in the same way in which he makes aluminium rings from the fuse caps of German shells. He works at them with all his heart and never lets up until they are finished and a credit to him.

When at last the day came I tasted one of the purest joys of my life. Each of us, in turn, sighted from the entrance of the *boyau* and found that we could see from one extremity to the other without moving and that a bullet fired from a rifle would go through from end to end. Five minutes later I was dreaming like a king upon my straw.

The war has given us simple tastes and rendered our ambitions modest by bridging over many centuries and taking us back to the age of the cave-dwellers. With the hardest of heart-breaking work we have had to defend our trenches and shelters, not only against the attacks of man, but also against the violence of Nature. We have borne it all without a thought of

despair and almost without complaint. We shall cease to endure only if, after the war, pseudo philosophers again begin teaching lazy people to regard pleasure and luxury as their supreme goal. If we gave the right to live and the right to happiness to a new generation composed only of idlers, we should be insulting our dead and our own past sufferings.

In the middle of December, 1914, it was not a question of our rights. Only a few days earlier, after a severe bombardment, the Germans had taken us by surprise and destroyed a part of our trenches. We promptly chased them out again and were awaiting a second attack when a new enemy appeared in the form of rain.

I remember the night-watch in the officers' post. The captain was sleeping on the ground on a bundle of damp straw. At his feet lay his orderly, Joseph. He was a perfect type of faithful servant and always slept thus with his head pillowed on his master's legs. They were snoring peacefully, a shapeless heap over which we tried not to stumble. Reclining on some empty sacks was the guard, telling stories of his own part of the country to a scoffing

lad who was fastening some tent canvas to the ceiling to prevent a leak. Another lieutenant and I were seated upon the same plank. The rain was beating down violently outside, while inside the cold water was dripping treacherously down upon our backs. Six men in all, we filled this wretched hole so completely that a mouse scarcely could have passed between us.

For two hours it had been raining. It was my duty and that of my friend to go alternately to the trench. In those days we did not enjoy the luxury of waterproofs, nor did we have pocket-lamps. We had gone to war without thinking of such things.

When my turn came I went to chat a little with the lookouts. I found them drenched to the skin. Since that time we have undergone both longer and stronger rains, but never have we seen so much water. From midnight to midnight, for twenty-four whole hours, we had to watch the caving in of the ground about us, and finally the destruction of our trenches. In order to escape, for a moment, from the mud—in which we sank to our ankles and in certain spots up to our knees—I climbed up onto the field behind the line and tried to clean

my clogged shoes in the damp grass. The day before a large pit had been dug there, in which we had intended to instal our Headquarters staff. It had not been covered and I wanted to see what remained of it. I climbed down and found it full of water save for an elevation in one corner intended to serve as a bed.

I was sitting sadly upon an old box when, suddenly, I felt a warm breath on my cheek. A great black shape had emerged from the shadows. It proved to be a large, silent dog, soaked through and through, who thrust his muzzle in my ear. He was very unhappy, but no more than I. When I petted him, it was like touching a wet sponge in a bucket of tepid water. I moved away; he followed me. Never have I been more impressed than by the precautions that animal took to keep from making any noise. There are dogs who bay at the moon and howl at death. The throat of this one must have been choked by the universal mourning. He went down with me into the trench where I heard him splashing in the water behind me and panting mournfully. I managed to persuade him to curl up against Joseph, but in

the morning I was told that he had disappeared like a ghost.

I heard of the fate of our shelter and of its inhabitants the next day from someone else. My friend and I, in the meantime, were busily occupied with the men. We felt we could set them a good example, even if we were powerless to help in any other way. We learned, however, that at four o'clock in the morning the roof of our post had caved in on top of the captain. The poor man, who was already old, had managed after much difficulty to reach the shelter of a non-commissioned officer. He was sent to the rear some days later. As for the faithful Joseph, he had remained to watch the supplies all that day and night resolving, partly from devotion, partly from fear, to die in that swamp rather than to cross the surrounding quagmire which the evening before we had so proudly called "*le boyau de commandement;*" "*le poste des agents de liaisons;*" "*le poste téléphonique.*" He neither ate nor moved until the following night when we were relieved, and then it was necessary to assist him behind the lines.

Now commenced a series of trials in which the men showed a truly heroic resignation.

Their rifles had been left in various dugouts and when the men went to hunt for them there was so much mud, in what remained of the trenches, that they had to take off their shoes and roll up their trousers to their thighs. That was a novelty and they laughed. But when, after donning their equipment preparatory to going to rest billets in the neighbouring village, the company was unexpectedly ordered to remain in the second line, the men felt more like weeping. They were willing to spend fifty days in the trenches if so ordered, but it was a sore trial when, actually on the way back to cantonment, they learned that there had been a counter order and that they would once again have to choose between remaining outside in the drenching rain, or lying down, soaked to the skin, in a freezing cave filled with mud. The poor fellows spent their night huddled against bare trees, which at this stage of the war had not yet been levelled.

The next day some forty of them were working on a neighbouring road using their shovels to repair the damage done by the flood, when there came the whistle of a shell falling right in their midst. They all threw themselves flat on the ground. I was fifteen

metres away and when I got up again I saw them all dispersing like a flock of frightened sparrows. In a moment they had disappeared into the trench, all save four who were dragging themselves along the ground. We ran to them and found them seriously but not mortally wounded.

Yet that night, when marching back to the rear, do you think the men spoke of the rain, of the sufferings they had endured? Of them never a word; but someone remarked that if a French 75-millimetre shell had fallen in the same way as the enemy shell, it would have killed at least forty men, and they made fun of the Germans.

When we came back, four days later, we found the trench entirely rebuilt. Our comrades had done their work well.

Such misfortunes would not happen to us to-day. Now we have drains in the *boyaux*, linings along the firing parapets, and solidly built shelters. The labour necessary to bring about these results was enormous.

At first we had only a firing trench and along it each of us dug a hole for himself, as best he could, in which he might try to sleep. Later on another trench was built parallel to the first and connected by a small *boyau*.

To right and left, in this second trench which resembled a street, were the caves in which we installed ourselves. We gave all sorts of names to these compartments—"*cagna*," "*gourbi*," "*guitoune*," etc. Officially they are known as *abris* (shelters).

Communication with this double line of trenches was possible only at night. Next, the great *boyaux* were invented which allowed complete communication between the first line and the rear in broad daylight. To-day these are numerous and intersect like the streets of a city. These streets were given names such as "*Boyau* of the Rats"; "*Boyau* of the Germans"; "*Boyau* Castlenau" because otherwise it would be hopeless to try and find one's way among these paths which look exactly alike. If there was an inn, a grocery store, or a pharmacy at this or that corner, it would be simple. But one still goes astray, although the names are placarded everywhere.

I wonder whether it will ever be possible to estimate the labour represented by such works of excavation. If our men have found security or repose in their subterranean houses, they have fully earned the right to enjoy them.

To-day it is in the architecture of the *gourbis* that we excel. There are two schools: those who advocate the cave dug in the side of the wall and those who prefer the built-up shelter.

The dugouts had to be prohibited at one time in a certain region, because they were always caving in. Here where we are, on the contrary they are recommended, but must be very deep and timbered. We have in our ranks miners from Pas-de-Calais who construct them.

At first the shelters were badly covered. An old door and a little earth sufficed; we were not difficult to please. If a man had a few branches and a tent canvas over his head, he felt that he could play *manille* in absolute security. If a shell burst, he answered it by throwing down a trump. Many were killed in this manner, in *gourbis* covered only with canvas and wood. Little by little the number of shell-proof shelters increased and now our men spend the major part of their time in bringing up from the rear enormous wooden beams to be placed in numerous and compact layers on the roofs of our shelters.

All this does not resemble the stories

which are written about this war. If you prefer to hear about deeds of valour, let others relate them. After peace is declared we will feast on glory while reviving the memories that we are now accumulating. My present object is to pay tribute to the intrepidity of the troops, even in the most modest instances, and to analyze the lesson that each of us will learn from our great hour of trial. Whatever our rank, our education, or our especial science, we have all become excavators or burden-bearers. At the barracks the men used to complain because they were set to work peeling potatoes. Here the potatoes are peeled by cooks, but as soon as the men return from the observation post and unload their rifles, they must lay aside their proud rôle of guardians of France and march off with enormous timbers upon their shoulders, their heads bowed and their faces covered with perspiration, more like convicts than like soldiers. Pride must be strengthened with muscle. Night and day we must resign ourselves to a kind of labour which would be considered degrading in civil life. But it is our duty. The humblest tasks are ennobled by virtue of this magical word which we had for-

gotten and which the war has taught us once more.

Proof of this is found in the gladness of our hearts. We find joy in the smallest things and we laugh incessantly. I do not mean to say there are no desirable joys in peace, but we had become satiated with enjoyment like rich children who have too many toys within their grasp. This is a school of suffering and we learn to content ourselves with little. This corporal who has made an excellent saw out of an old clock-spring found in the ruins of a village, and who uses it to make rings from the aluminium shell-fuses, is happier now with his improvised tool than when he used his leisure time in running from cabaret to cabaret. This is a vital lesson, we must not let it pass unnoticed.

It is good for all of us in every rank. The men accomplish their hard tasks, but the officers who command them are little more than overseers assigned to a hard, inglorious labour. They also bow to the inevitable.

I can remember Commandant V—— supervising the distribution of picks and shovels among the men of my company. He is a distinguished officer and now pur-

sues his career at the head of a splendid regiment. I will always regret the departure of this chief whose many accomplishments and knowledge of science always made me marvel. He was very strict in the service, but above all strict with himself. He would have a charming ease of manner after giving his orders, which were always precise. He received great parcels from home and he loved to have us share his luxuries. At the bottom of the short notes of instruction which he wrote for us each day there always were sentences like this: "For the officers: an artichoke, a cake, three fresh eggs." Another time it would be a small can of *foie gras*, or sardines, or the first spring radishes. But, on the other hand, if it was a question of hastily constructing a *boyau* he would insist that the tool count be exact, that the distribution of work along the different sectors be made in an orderly manner—in silence and with the greatest possible speed. Even if it rained in torrents he would stand among the beet fields, straight as an arrow, emphasizing his orders with a wave of his stick.

In addition, it was always he himself who traced out the work that had to be done.

Once I spent an entire night at his side while the men were strengthening with timbers a new line of communication which he wished to establish between our first and second lines. Twice I tried to tell him that I would manage the affair without him. He would not admit that a chief should rest when his subordinates were working.

My friends and I admired the importance that this man attached to the smallest duties. During the tragic hours of the beginning of the campaign he had given the highest proof of his worth and it was a great inspiration to us.

As for the colonel, I shall always recollect him and the robber-like cave in which he lived at the beginning of the trench warfare. As there were no *boyaux* in those days it was possible to visit him only after nightfall and in the dark one often wandered interminably in the beet fields, guarding the cows as the men call it, before finding the beam of light emerging from the hole in the ground which was his home. After descending a few steps and pushing aside a canvas curtain usually soaked from the heavy rains, one entered a rectangular



chamber always filled with tobacco smoke. The walls were littered with objects either hanging on hooks or reposing on crudely constructed shelves—pieces of china, a few books, several rifles, a German helmet, maps in quantities, quite a few bottles, and a telephone. The place was furnished with a straw mattress, a stove, a chair, and a table piled high with journals, notes, and papers. Sitting behind the table would be found a magnificent looking man clad in a hunting vest and velvet trousers. One would scarcely think him a soldier, but rather a philosopher taking refuge from the world in order to enjoy his favourite pleasures—reading and meditation. However, that powerful jaw denoted the man of action, and did one ever encounter a hermit with such gaiety of manner?

The source of his contentment was no secret. Having experienced every horror of war and having prepared himself a hundred times to make the sacrifice of his life, he was no longer affected by the petty privations and miseries which ordinarily offend humanity. On the contrary, the slightest distraction in his den assumed the proportions of a beautiful event from which he



drew the greatest delectation. Personally, I have never laughed so much or so wholeheartedly as since the beginning of the war. Do not say it is hysteria, it is the laughter of cheerfulness.

One evening there were to be seen three crazy people, singing as they ran arm in arm along the road. Shall I confess that I was one of them? It was midnight. My two comrades and I had just come from the *boyaux*. Our men were marching ahead of us, delighted to be going back to the cantonment for rest. We, the officers, were following the company at a distance, having been delayed by the necessity of minutely explaining the orders to those who were relieving us. Our hearts began to beat more quickly when we mounted the earthen steps which liberated us from the last trench and we felt for the first time in a fortnight the fresh air about us and a good stone road under our feet. Our emotion was scarcely due to relief at turning our backs to the enemy. We were only leaving the zone of bullets for that of shells, as the camp, which was the object of our desire, was constantly under bombardment. But we were escaping from out tombs

I recall that the sky was gray and full of dark, majestically-moving clouds which seemed full of water. Through this humid screen the moon shed enough light to illuminate and magnify two or three solitary trees on the plain. I found time in the midst of my gaiety to think of Corot. He would have loved to see the foliage melt away and the limbs of the elms stretch out their black lines in a ghostly night like this. However, the firm white earth of a real French road was more charming to us than all the poetry of these tragic trees.

We pounded our heels upon the stones, and certainly the heels of a soldier make enough noise without that. We threw out our chests and suddenly surprised one another by saying almost together that we were happy. The enemy's rockets danced to right and left and behind, illuminating the horizon as if for a feast. Guns roared in the distance like lions in a menagerie. Softly we hummed the old home songs and they brought back all the vivid memories of my youth.

A long time ago I gambolled with other children of my age on the road which runs along the beach of Middlekerque. I did not

dream that one day Middlekerque would be at the extreme right of the most terrible army of invasion ever known in history, and still less did I think that, if that event occurred, I should find myself, as in those fine autumnal mornings, singing "*Frère Jacques*" with friends just as dear.

III

Liberty

THIS morning we had to punish two men who were guilty of absence from the camp at night. During our march back to the trenches I watched them in the ranks. They were not accepting their misfortune cheerfully. Still full of wine, with their heads heavy from the fumes of the liquor, they were exchanging their views on destiny, like the augurs of old!

"I wish this war would end soon!"

"We shall be able to say what we think then!"

"And we shall be free once more."

"We can tell them a few things when we get our freedom back!"

It hurts me to hear them misconceive liberty in this fashion for I, too, love it dearly —but not as they do. They want the right

to say everything, to do anything, to overturn everything. Personally, I want more and less than that in order that my soul may remain free.

Wise people have known for a long time, and the mass have learned from the war, that pure liberty—that is to say true freedom of will—does not exist. What exists is servitude; all men, all beings, even the most powerful have to submit to that law.

At the present time we have the choice between French discipline and German tyranny. The only liberty we can enjoy is the preference of one to the other. Once the decision is made, nobility consists in trying to serve the good cause without abasement. One can obey worthily or dishonourably. Freedom exists only in degrees of servitude. One finds both heroes and cowards under the same yoke. To the coward the hero seems a free man.

The important thing is to distinguish between good and evil obedience and to recognize among the primary laws those to which, on account of his nature, man must submit. There is merit and beauty in following by preference these inevitable laws. One shows a weakness in submitting to the

others without complaint; the free man does not always obey unquestioningly.

But which are these necessary laws?

In the material order of things we are beginning to recognize them. The law of falling bodies, for example, must be obeyed whether you wish to obey it or not. If you rebel against it, you are not thought free but insane! Mad people throw themselves out of windows; people of intelligence accept the necessity of descending to the street by the stairs. They know that it is not humiliating slavery to obey the law of gravity which binds them to the ground. The recognition of other necessary laws will help us to conquer the air without violating those rules which govern matter. Our fault consists in not knowing these other laws or in knowing them imperfectly. Investigators and scientists devote their attention to finding them; and when they have been formulated, business people apply them. That is called progress and proves that as regards matter the last word of progress is not "liberty," but the intelligent obedience of mankind to the laws of the universe.

It is just the same in the spiritual order of things. True friends of liberty do not

rebel against these laws but try to know them in order to submit to them.

Thus more than one of the familiar notions of our so-called "intellectuals" are overturned. We like to establish liberty in our institutions. Nothing is more fruitless. The thing to establish is not liberty but order.

We are accustomed to speak of our rights as free men. In regard to liberty we have no rights but two duties: to obey the true laws and to free ourselves from the others.

Let each of us exert his intelligence and his heart to follow these principles and the result will be wise men with high ideals.

The great present law is to save our Motherland. At the time of the mobilization we found ourselves face to face with numerous obligations, of which only one was valid. It was necessary to overcome many obstacles, to free ourselves of many duties, to obtain release from ties which were regarded as sacred in times of peace, and to offer ourselves to a new servitude with hands free and souls which owed no other allegiance. Only thus could the two duties of independence and obedience be observed at the same time.

It is said that noble spirits love to free themselves from the yoke. The French soldiers in violently breaking their other chains to surrender to this, the most sacred law, felt an unequalled joy in spite of their tears. If you doubt it, compare the peace reigning in their hearts with the pangs felt by those who, under a thousand pretexts, have remained behind the lines. One had to devote himself to his children, another to his business affairs, others to their usual pursuits, to their vices, to their cowardice. We always have ties. We must sever them when our duty to liberty demands it. Let all the French people free themselves in this manner and the word "liberty," which was formerly empty of meaning when applied to our institutions, becomes a reality.

A citizen thinks himself free if he chooses his sovereign. However, before voting he tries to find out the opinions of the official whom he distrusts and sums up the services that the nominee can render him if elected. The shopkeeper in addition considers the opinion of his clients and his purveyors before voting. He ought to obey the law of the public good instead of the many unworthy ones which make him a slave.

It is true that this man ought not to be burdened with the responsibility of such a choice. It is no easier to recognize the public good than the great laws which rule Nature. If we want the French people to be free, that is to say, subject only to reasonable laws, then let us leave the care of establishing order to the people who are capable of it and demand from them guarantees of competence, continuity, and responsibility. Expect from them not liberty but prudent laws. Free citizens should neither rebel against these laws nor against the people who have the difficult task of formulating them; but rather against the low kinds of tyranny which weigh heavily upon most men.

When after forty days in the trenches one goes to the cantonment for a rest it is difficult to be serious. It would seem so easy to spend those five days only in following one's fancy. Instead a march to the nearest forest is usually ordered to occupy the troops, amuse them, and exercise their stiff limbs. They have all lost the habit of keeping their places in the ranks. However, the officers must keep them well grouped and aligned. We once met a troop

of harassed territorials who were marching along anyhow. The sight of them amused our fellows very much and I listened to their remarks.

"Do you see those fire-men?"

"They are so old they no longer know how to march."

"Do you call that a proper defile?"

A little later we met a company of young soldiers belonging to the "class 15" whom we all love. Our men exchanged their impressions like connoisseurs. They were proud of their little comrades and admired their easy gait and orderly ranks, but that did not make them any more ready to follow their example. However, the officers were there to enforce discipline. It is annoying to have to stay in the ranks! If a man stops to light his pipe or to speak to a passerby he must run to catch up with his comrades. It is hot, and his flask is empty! If only he were free to stop at the public house in the first village!

Even I felt tired toward the end of the march that morning and there yet remained two kilometres to go. On my left, only two paces away, was an inviting green slope. Free, I should have thrown myself down on

it with delight. One of my men, nicknamed "Le Tunisien," was very thirsty, but drinking was against the rule. During the halt I had to take from his very lips the large glass of white wine which a good woman had brought him. It is sad to find such obstacles in the way of our liberty, but we must accustom ourselves to them. At the end of the morning the men of themselves fell into the rhythmic march step and when we returned all felt happy. If we had straggled like a flock of sheep we would have come back cross and worn out.

Must we then praise servitude and despise all liberties? We must give authority and hierarchy, in turn, our unfailing devotion and accept with philosophy some hard constraints. But even under discipline one can —and ought to—preserve the sense of freedom.

In the field we feel acutely the value of obedience. We know that we shall liberate France by our zeal in serving her. Nevertheless, I have never loved true liberty more then here. It is because we have detached ourselves from our accustomed ties. Not only have we broken away from those we hold most dear but, since the second of

August, 1914, many of us have irretrievably made the sacrifice of our lives. We can not submit to questionable restraints after having freed ourselves in this manner from those which legitimately dominate the community of mankind.

Servility is rare now, although it used to be common in peace time. Certain officers were spoken of by their comrades as being *frousse*. That word defined a defect of which I have found no trace here. It consisted of betraying agitation in front of one's chiefs and in fearing to assume responsibilities. A soldier who degrades himself in this manner is not worthy of his uniform. He is afraid because he mistakes the rôle and the power of those in authority over him. He is thinking of his advancement, of various advantages to be gained from them. If instead he demands of them information and direction for his service he will be a man of worth and a good soldier. In addition he will have the pride of owing the success of his career to his own personal merit. I do not obey my superior officers in order to gain profits by my *meek* obedience but because it is my law. It is quite natural for a man whose life is at stake to serve well.

This determines my actions; and, beyond my obligations as a soldier and the respect which I owe to those of superior rank, I do not accept here the orders of any master.

After the war I think the French will accustom themselves to this reasonable conception of individual liberty. Nine of our *départements* are paying now with hardest slavery for the liberties which we have been taking for the last forty years with the power of our nation. Let us first free our France from servitude to Germany; we can then devote ourselves to our duties toward France alone. Thus shall we become free citizens without knowing it.

IV

Comrades in Arms

AT THE outset of the war I received a charming letter from a friend who had just been promoted to the rank of sub-lieutenant. He wrote thus:

MY OLD FRIEND:

Here I am transformed into an officer. Since this morning I have worn the cap, sword, and gloves of a sub-lieutenant and one little stripe on each sleeve. The troops salute me and the sentinels present arms. You can conceive my emotion; not to mention a little thrill of conceit. I am like other men, a little foolish at times, and even at my age one feels a childish joy in seeing that one's costume is being admired. I blushed when, in the distance, I saw the first soldier who was going to salute me. I noticed that he threw away his cigarette and straightened a button on his coat and I thought: "He is going to salute me!" It happened as I expected. He made a great bow, looking me straight in the eyes, just as if I had always been an officer! I answered him graciously; I was so pleased!

After him many passed who were just as nice. Nearly all of them put a fine conviction in their gesture. Do the soldiers of other nations have an appearance as frank when they salute? My heart would not be in the right place if I did not love these men. The salute is a sign of respect, a thing which to-day exists almost nowhere but in the army. Nothing elevates a man as much as the feeling that he is respected. In the salutes of these soldiers I also see a confidence which is touching. Naturally I desire to justify this confidence and I want to be worthy of commanding those who entrust themselves to me in this manner.

Yes, the soldiers do trust themselves to their chiefs. A week ago at the camp the colonel suddenly called all the officers together. There was great excitement: the trenches were to be carried five hundred metres forward. The two companies who were at rest had to return to the front, in an hour, to participate in the operation. It was one which might cost us dear, and the men, as soon as they were told of it, equipped themselves silently. There was the inevitable confusion of the first few minutes. As we walked about the streets the faces of the men were all turned toward ours. From every side eyes were trying to pierce the depths of our minds. They

wanted to know what the officers were thinking, what they were hiding in their souls. With anxious eyes they gave themselves into our keeping, but also seemed to implore: "You are coming with us, aren't you? You are the leaders. You can count on us, but we also count on you!" Like my recently promoted comrade, who so deeply appreciated the salutes to his new rank, I looked affectionately at those imploring eyes.

We do not know exactly the relations between the men and the officers in the German army. In France the finest fraternity exists among all those who wear the uniform. There has been some discussion as to whether the officers were right in using toward the men the familiar form of speech—*tu* (thou) instead of *vous* (you). As a matter of fact, it is an almost general practice at present.

From the officer's standpoint I can see the need of establishing that familiarity. At the barracks, in peace time, the men always use the *tu* among themselves. It seems natural: they are of the same age and all young. At the war it is more remarkable that they do this because one

finds a youngster of the class "17" in the ranks beside an old, wrinkled, stooping man of the class 1891. However, they live together like brothers, and if one were addressed as *vous*, he would not like it. We are naturally tempted to use their own language in speaking to these simple people whose existence we share. One does not use the familiar form of speech among the officers, save among comrades of the active army who have been promoted together. To me it seems very simple. Among soldiers one says *tu;* I am a soldier, therefore I use it; it comes easily.

But the men say *vous* to me and find it natural to address me with respect. It only remains to ask whether they mind my treating them familiarly? Most assuredly not. Why? Because at the front the relations between men have suddenly become natural and simple. In peace time, a civilian chief must observe all the formalities with his touchy subordinates. He says *vous* to these gentlemen who sometimes hate him. Here everyone sees in the officer a master in the full sense of the word—that is to say, the man who commands and protects. The military chief is the father: the men

accept his authority hand in hand with his affection. The familiar form of speech does not shock them, it comforts them.

If you want to know what conception they have of their duty toward their officers, hear this sentence pronounced one evening by an intoxicated man, who thought he had been badly used by his captain: "If he falls in the beet fields I won't be the one to go and get him." The poor fellow was very angry and had thought of the worst punishment a soldier could inflict on his captain—to leave him wounded on the battlefield. It is certainly true that in the fray each man considers himself the Newfoundland dog of his chief. The officer who does his duty toward his soldiers knows perfectly well that, should an injury befall him, each one of them will be ready to carry him on his shoulders or in his arms at the peril of his life. Can there be any objection to treating these children, who are devoted even unto death, like our own sons?

The other day my orderly was astonished at a command I gave him. The good fellow thought it was not serious and said with a large smile: "My lieutenant is joking!"

I found these words charming because they implied so much. First there is the sense of respect: I had never told him to address me in the third person. It came as naturally to him as using the familiar form came to me. Nothing would induce him to deviate from the custom. When the orderlies are talking together one will say:

"My lieutenant is calling you."

"Which one—yours or mine?"

"Not mine; it is my Lieutenant M——"

That "my" is intangible and part of the title. In my orderly's answer there were: the third person, to indicate respect; the possessive, to indicate affection; and the word "joking," to indicate the joy of being comrades in arms.

Brothers in arms! For many years people have told us that all men were brothers. It has even been engraved in the motto: "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" on the walls of all our public buildings. The Germans have shown us what it is worth. Of the French fraternity, on the other hand, before the war we knew but little. I would like to make you understand how great is the friendship we feel for these

soldiers amongst whom we live, sharing the same emotions and the same dangers.

One night the cooks, who always know everything, announced that a battery of 75-millimeter guns was coming up to our lines to knock down the chimney of H—— which was situated a few miles ahead of us. It was a very tall factory chimney which dominated the entire plain. We knew that the Germans used it as an observation post from which they could spy on our slightest movements not only as far as our third line but clear back to our positions of retreat. They had installed in it good optical instruments of which they were very proud; in fact, they would expend several shells on a single man taking exercise at the rear; not for the profit they got from it, but just to astonish us.

That night it was my turn on guard. The next day at the early hour selected by the artillery for the bombardment, I was resting four metres below ground. I shall always remember that horrible, propped-up cave: at my feet was the lamentable comforter, formerly red, that for months we had been dragging from trench to trench. At the back on a table rudely made from the re-

mains of a door stood our smoky lamp; hanging to the wall our glasses, our revolvers, a package of grenade fuses, innumerable cans, periscopes, masks against asphyxiating gas, and bulging knapsacks. Above the table on a small plank stood our bread loaves, bottles, and goblets. The lamp flickered and gave an awful odour. My bed was not too comfortable—very little straw on the hard earth—my pillow, a bag filled with sand. But I was sleeping soundly when a shout suddenly awakened me.

"My Lieutenant, they are going to hit it on the head."

"What is it?"

"The chimney."

"All right, let me sleep."

I was just dozing off again when a sharp report shook my cave, the sound of a departing "75" shell. Nothing for seven or eight seconds, then a distant thunder and almost at once a rapid crackling sound which astonished me. I sat up! Was it a volley? Then the silence once more. I shall never forget what I felt then. The outside noises reached me muffled, and I marvelled at being alone with my thoughts when the excitement was so great only a few steps away. The

crackling sound which had alarmed me was caused by the clapping of many hands, as at a theatre. Later, I congratulated myself at having stayed lazily in my hole, for I had the best place from which to witness the bombardment of the chimney. Even now I can close my eyes and see it all clearly. Anyone can imagine a chimney which is beginning to totter. Shells explode around it, then pierce it, raising a cloud of brick-coloured dust. Suddenly it bends, breaks in three pieces, and crumbles to the ground. But imagine the soldiers clapping hands at each successful shell. I could hear the rattle of their applause and it stabbed my heart. In the profound silence that followed, I thought of all those Frenchmen, crazy with joy, while we were destroying one of our own factories. My orderly remarked:

"I wonder whether the Boche stayed up there."

An Alsatian prisoner asserted a few days later that an observing officer had indeed been surprised by the bombardment and had come down with the chimney. In any case, that remark of my orderly stirred my imagination on the subject, and I pictured

to myself the horrible agony of the German at the top of his tower.

The reports of the guns continued one after the other. The men now no longer clapped. They probably were as anxiously expectant as I. It seemed to me as if a direct communication had been established between their souls and mine, and it was a real comfort for me to feel, even with my eyes shut, the same impressions that were moving them. Suddenly I heard a shriek like that of a band of schoolboys running out for the hour of recreation. All those big children of mine were crying victory! Ah, the dear fellows! How clear, how young, how charming their voices sounded in that delirious moment. It was better not to be too close. Near by I should probably have heard some objectionable remarks. They said:

"Bravo! Hurrah! *Vive la France!*"

But they doubtless used many less heroic words and applied to the Boches names much more vulgar. What matter? The important thing is to know how to extract the most from certain moments. I realized during that one that we were really brothers. That is to say, the young and

care-free sons of a mother for the love of whom this cry of triumph was uttered. What, after all, are we in contrast to the Motherland? The candid accents of their acclamations put these men and myself in our true place, a very humble one. Poor, insignificant soldiers of an immortal France, in going through this simple emotion together we learned how to unite our lowly hearts and love one another.

Really, it is not difficult to fraternize with a crowd of soldiers. As a class, the common people are easy-going. When one leaves them in their proper place and does not ask them to think or feel beyond their possibilities, they are naturally docile and confident. The wonderful thing is the harmony among the officers. Although of extremely varied types they live in a very close intimacy. So many things might sever these ties: race, education, religion, fortune, age, or character. Before the enemy, the differences efface themselves. There remain only honest people, clinging to one another.

At camp one day the sudden arrival of a new regiment was announced. We ran to the doors to see them march by. I must

own that at the front, where the distractions are not numerous, one is prone to become a spectator. When soldiers go by we stand in a row, looking with staring eyes.

When these warriors had stacked arms and broken ranks, two officers detached themselves from the group and entered the house whose doorway we filled. They inquired of our orderlies:

"Can we have dinner here?"

"But, sir, the place is already taken."

"All the more reason. We'll make arrangements with our colleagues. We will pay, you know."

I came forward. The officer who had spoken planted himself in front of me. He was a little man with a tanned face worn by hard work. Poised on the side of his head was a battered cap which he shifted with each sentence, as if he were trying to find the funniest way of crowning his mischievous forehead. His short legs were tucked into extraordinarily wide breeches. He had straight blue eyes and the truest accent of the Paris *Faubourgs*.

"Dear Monsieur, I introduce myself: Lieutenant B——. I am a reserve officer. I work in a grocery store. And you?"

"I am Lieutenant R——."

"Aren't we going to mess together?"

My comrades had gathered around him in a circle and we were beginning to enjoy the situation immensely. We quickly came to terms and the orderlies got ready to lay the table.

"By the way," said I. "How many are you? Two?"

"No, indeed, my friend! Say eight, unless that wretch G—— again plays us the trick of not coming."

He then proceeded to explain that G—— was the *adjudant*, a good soul, but mad about the service, and who would much rather give up his lunch than overlook the smallest of his duties.

An *adjudant!* All right! We sat down. The jovial grocer took the best place, tucked at least half of his napkin in his collar, put his two hands on his short hips, looked at us with eyes full of fun, and lifting his tiny cap, loudly proclaimed that he was from Ménilmontant.

At first this phenomenal creature had frightened me, but he seemed so happy at being an officer, privileged to fight bravely, eat gluttonously, and drink good wine with

comrades or colleagues, as he called them, that his joy little by little won us over. What ceased to be funny was the *adjudant's* empty place. I really feared his entrance, even more so since his lieutenant constantly repeated:

"Oh, what a character!"

My fears were increased by the fact that the other lieutenant, whom I disliked, professed great friendship for the absentee. He had introduced himself rather ceremoniously. Profession: schoolmaster in a village in the *Département* of La Loire, and secretary to the Mayor. I know the community: it is the most revolutionary one in the whole region. Its mayor is a redoubtable radical socialist, a terrible man, and in front of me was seated his intimate collaborator. We talked and I was surprised to find him an amiable fellow, not lacking in poise, entirely absorbed in the beautiful profession of soldiering. But what would his friend, the *adjudant* be like?

"Here he is!"

The exclamation was uttered by the grocer. The whole band got up to greet him, waving their napkins. [Enter the adjudant.]

"Ladies and gentlemen."

"Well," whispered one of my comrades. "Here is another one who takes life merrily."

His place was next to me. I looked at him: closely cropped head, ordinary soldier's appearance.

He sat down, laid his napkin on his lap, began to eat slowly in silence.

"A simpleton," I thought.

However, it is necessary to treat one's guests with courtesy, so I emptied the rest of the wine bottle in a glass, murmuring to put myself on a level with them:

"You will be married within the year."

"No, I won't, for the good reason that I am an Abbé."

"The truth is out," said the man from Ménilmontant, at the other end of the table.

Why, yes, the truth was out. I own that I foresaw nothing of the sort.

My neighbour added, in a whisper:

"And you know of me, I am the Abbé G——. Vicar of N——."

He named one of the most intelligent and active priests of our times, a sort of an apostle, very young and already famous. I then looked at him attentively and discov-

ered a beautiful, strong-willed, clean-cut jaw; a fine mouth, and piercing eyes, deep set under a calm forehead.

The others, the *Poilus*, were delighted at our surprise, and they asked the *adjudant* to relate why he had been mentioned in dispatches. They had to insist, but with those rogues one had to give in or produce a good reason for not doing so. He finally explained that there had been no one willing to go and bring in a man who had fallen wounded in front of the enemy lines. He himself crawled rapidly out toward him, hoping to be able to give the poor fellow the extreme unction, and ran right into the midst of a German patrol. He was alone, unarmed. The officer, a Bavarian, held a revolver to his head. The Abbé then looked him well in the face and said:

"You surely wouldn't think of killing me lying down. Wait till I get up."

The other thought the Frenchman was calling a troop to his rescue and, taken with panic, ran away with his men.

What impressed me most during that story was the sight of the joyful eyes and visible admiration of the anti-clerical schoolmaster—I met the latter the next morning.

We talked over his troublesome community, his mayor, and his politics before the war.

"Pooh," said he; "we will look after that when we come back. In the meantime, I have had a beautiful sleep."

"Where?"

"Across the street. The sheets were clean, the bed good but not very wide."

"What do you mean? I know that bed. It is a double bed."

"That's just it, there are two of us."

"Whom did you sleep with?"

"With no other than the Abbé."

V

Glory

A QUEER silence reigns over the fields where we are entrenched! Certainly the guns are often noisy and the whistle of the shells is in our ears, but no bells sound from the neighbouring churches; there are no more roosters crowing in the farmyards, no more dogs to make the echoes ring with their barking, no more whips cracking gaily. I have often had here the impression of being far out at sea. Our dugout is narrow and low like a cabin. The thunder of the artillery resembles the sound of the waves in a storm. When a bomb bursts in our sector the earthen vaults vibrate like the hull of a ship. If we go out at night to stand guard in the firing trench or at the listening post, it seems as if we were going on the captain's bridge and like sailors we fix our eyes on the black

horizon. This impression is chiefly caused by the fact that the plain is dead like the ocean. Hearing is perhaps the most acute of our senses. All the familiar noises which usually come through the air in the fields are absent from here, and the earth seems to me cold and hostile like a stretch of salt water.

And yet our men are gay and dream beautiful dreams in their gloomy holes. Yesterday, when one of them was looking depressed, an officer passed.

"What are you thinking of, old man?"

"My home."

"You will see it again, sir, all right."

"Ah! I am not so sure, but when one worries one reads the *citations**: it cheers you up!"

Can that man who always seemed an amateur soldier be interested in heroes and would he really like to become one himself? Is it possible? But better things still are happening. We have in the company a particularly uncouth individual. He always has a dirty face and his clothes are never more than half fastened. He is short legged like a bull terrier and as ugly as sin. During the

*Mentions in Dispatches.

past month every day at twilight he would stride over the trench and go, with his hands in his pockets and a shovel under his arm, toward the enemy's lines. Many German corpses were lying out there. At each journey he would bury several and come back swearing against these miscreants who leave their dead unburied in the beet fields. We gave him a little brandy as a reward. Perhaps you think we were rid of him after that? I thought so, too. But yesterday, while we were talking about a soldier who, for his gallantry, had been mentioned in dispatches he passed by grumbling and I heard him mumble:

"I guess it ought to be my turn to be cited!"

The grave-digger, too, was working to be admired and wanted to read his name among those of the heroes!

That incident made me ponder, and at night I meditated on glory, while, opposite, the enemy was firing spasmodically.

What is glory? It is the more radiant light of one being outshining that of others. One can perform a noble action and keep it secret, but it needs the help of the crowd to make it a glorious one. A hero judges

the degree of his glory by the number of those who pay him tribute.

And that is why glory is at the same time so beautiful and so fruitless.

There exists a popular proverb which neglects glory: "Do right and never mind what people say." Which means that our acts are of some value in themselves, independent of the judgment of men. It is a sage opinion, but a proud and contemptuous one. Should I then be sole judge of what is right or wrong? Haven't the men who are made in God's image souls as capable as mine of being moved by beauty? For my part, I think a great deal of my fellow creatures' opinions. I perceive, however, that the stupidity of the masses constitutes a peril which in its turn may encourage men to play to the gallery only. But honour to those who win the love of simple hearts! Confronted by eminent goodness or striking genius, all souls become simple, and admiration is glory. I pity the man who does not accept the homage of a sincere crowd as a divine caress.

However, we must have other responsibilities if we want the war in which we are engaged to bear its fruit. First, we must go to

it gravely. The Saint-Cyriens who went to the assault in their white gloves had the enviable rôle of writing the most moving and most noble page of the first part of the epic. We must write the others with a bold hand.

The other day at the camp our captain told us to talk to the men on some moral theme. We did it, on the duties of the father of a family in the war. I explained to the good fellows who sat around me that the more children one had the more ardour one ought to put in fighting. The loss of a bachelor is more fatal to the motherland than that of the head of a family because the first dies altogether, whereas the latter leaves children who carry on his work. Also a father knows better than any other why he is fighting. He defends his own home along with the other homes of his country. Really among the men around me, the best soldiers are those who have left at home four or five children whose pictures they show with emotion to everyone.

Glory, in the eyes of these people, is a fantasy. In mine it has a worse fault: it tempts people, in a materialistic age, to capitalize their virtues.

GLORY

Glory is fame with a hundred tongues, the "*fama*" of ancient Rome. Before the war one acquired fame by publicity instead of heroism. Men were classed according to their wealth and therefore everyone sought riches. With that aim, one needed to be popular and sought after. By certain means it is possible to commercialize one's fame and thus win fortune, but it involves heavy payment. In the world of scientists, artists, and writers, one also gains riches by parading and advertising one's merits, by blowing one's own trumpet. Advertisement is the plague of the century. That which requires great effort and preparation on the part of a notoriety seeker can be won in one day by a hero with a single fortunate gesture. A good thrust of the sword is therefore worth more than a hundred thousand francs of newspaper advertising.

I would feel ashamed of having dared to advance this comparison between glory and advertisement, but after the war we will go back to our cities with regenerated souls, which we must try to keep from every stain. Let us beware of ever making unworthy use of our great experiences.

Glory is a precious but heavy burden. When one has gained, by a heroic action or by a great achievement, the regard and the love of men, one belongs to the crowd—and the crowd is exacting. It is never satiated with glory and wants the hero to remain eternally worthy of its homage. For most soldiers this is easy. They die and their remembrance remains thenceforth unchangeable; if they live they cease after the war to occupy the public mind.

But I am sorry for those who, having once won renown, must devote themselves unceasingly to its propagation. It does not only require noble effort, it is not enough to give people fresh cause for admiration: one must guard oneself from the thousand pitfalls of popularity, answer all the acclamations with smiles, and evade a quantity of stupid invitations. One becomes the guardian of one's glory: one appraises it sometimes stingily, sometimes more generously; one spends one's life in petty bargaining. For my part I know few things more disappointing than to see some of these great men, hesitating between the fear of seeing their name unjustly forgotten, and their disgust for the unworthy contrivances to

which they must resort in order to maintain it in its rightful place. If, as I believe, it is only simplicity of heart which allows one to taste true happiness, those upon whom Glory has smiled run the risk of never again being perfectly happy.

Must we then fear glory or disdain it? I think we must love it, not for the enjoyment it brings us, but for the sake of mankind, to whom noble examples and inspiring spectacles are beneficial.

We have just had, here, an example of this. One of our young comrades a few days ago made a fortunate stroke. The general commanding the army had issued an order to capture at any cost and send to him a prisoner. Our friend was put in charge of the little expedition. He left with a few men and captured a German post, the chief occupant of which he killed. He came back after a short but very bloody struggle and brought with him a good-looking lad with great, startled blue eyes. There is not always great merit in taking a prisoner, but when one does it in this manner, by command, and goes out to get him in the trench opposite, not at one's chosen hour, but at the one arbitrarily fixed by the commandant,

the operation deserves praise, and our friend is to be cited among the brave.

The next day we were discussing, among ourselves, with much vivacity, the way in which he had conducted the operation.

Having found an unoccupied section of German trench, he had placed there the main part of his patrol, and had gone forward himself toward the neighbouring trench, accompanied by only one man. We wanted to determine whether he had acted wisely in exposing himself thus. Some praised him for it, others thought that in his boldness he had overstepped his duties as chief and had thus endangered the safety of his entire party.

We were getting somewhat excited when one of us wisely interrupted:

"My friends, let us argue no more. We are much excited, and there is but one conclusion from our useless discussion. If we are excited it is because we all secretly envy a happier comrade. Moreover, his action was very creditable to him, as well as to us. It proves that he has been a hero and that we all ardently desire to find an occasion to imitate him soon."

Nothing could have been truer. Our

hearts were surging within us. Our jealousy was a wholesome incentive to heroism! Envy is hateful; it is a base and shameful sentiment. If there are men whose souls are mean enough to witness with spite the honour which a brave man has won we must pity them. But one can be jealous of his bravery—that is to say, have the acute desire to equal him. Glory puts this ardour in the soul and that is why it is often as beneficial to those who seek it as it is fatal to those who have won it.

In our trenches its power is considerable. The *Army Bulletin* publishes information, songs, anecdotes, and, at the end of each number, the names of those cited in the orders of the day. Its editors could omit all the rest and leave only the citations. It is in order to read them that we all want the paper. I have seen some good fellows, lying flat on the muddy straw of their *gourbis*, slowly reading every citation, word by word, following the lines with their thick fingers.

Have they the ambition to be cited, too, in their turn? There are some who would be frightened by so much honour; they are the modest ones. Others, fathers of fam-

ilies, more soberly inclined, are only trying to do their duty. Their ambition is not to see their names in the papers, but to kiss their wives and children as soon as peace is signed.

But all, without exception, admire their comrades who have been mentioned. They admire; that is the chief thing. I love the glory which shines out from everywhere around us in this war, because of the great service it will have rendered the French soul in restoring the faculty of disinterested admiration.

Thus the hearts of these men who tramp along with me through the clay are becoming purified. They not only learn to love duty, itself, the source of all joys, but in serving only their country they exert themselves to free their souls from envy. They had been told that in order to be happy it was necessary to make use of all their rights, and to search for the most diverse pleasures. It will be possible, after the war, to explain to them, without being scoffed at, that the best are those who love to work and who, when the day is finished, return to find their joys in a home, simply furnished, but gay with laughter of many

voices. They had been advised not to tolerate superiority in others, that all citizens were equal, and here, with admiration, they acknowledge the superiority of certain men to others.

What will remain then of the principles on which rested the corrupt society in which we lived? Will it be possible, hereafter, to again mislead these people with malicious doctrines and render them egotistical, disorderly, and mean, in spite of the inherent virtue of the French race?

As for glory, let us love it if we have time. And you, whose hearts are following us, do not be shocked by the statement that we are not fighting for the love of the game. We are going to give the Germans a lesson, and we want our France to come out of the trial, not only safe, but exalted. The rest is only secondary. That is the feeling in our souls. Dream of the glory of those you love, their hallowed swords and their foreheads crowned with laurels; nothing could be better for you. For us, however, there is something more positive in this war.

VI

Larks, Poppies, Mice

WHEN I was a child my parents owned a bound collection of the "*L'Univers Illustré*" dating from the beginning of the Second Empire. I used to look at the pictures and read the captions underneath them. In this way all the people of rank at the Imperial Court were visualized for me. I remember that their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress of France, were always making innumerable trips to inaugurate railways or to compliment certain cities, large and small. I used to study the sovereign's august beard, represented by little undulated lines, each of which seemed to me to be a true hair drawn after nature. Nothing can ever prevent me from coupling in my imagination the forgotten art of wood engraving with the period of the majestic and comical hoop

skirt—a fashion which I hear is coming back. After turning many pages I came to the war of 1870, and then to the *Commune*. I followed those two tragedies with passionate interest. My eyes grew bigger when I looked at the military barricades, and I contemplated with terror the rough faces of the confederate troops, the entreating or resigned glances of the hostages, the extraordinary black blotches, representing flames on the roofs of the *Tuileries* or of the *Cour des Comptes*. At the time my mother was playing Grieg's Spring Song on the piano. Since then I have often heard it played at private or public concerts. Every time my heart jumps as if I were expecting to hear the crackle of shots of the Civil War.

Like Grieg's notes, which always bring to my ears the noise of firing, there is a small number of people and objects that, in the trenches, become associated with different senses. Henceforth, we shall no longer be able to see, hear, touch, or smell them without thinking of the war, which, through them, will haunt us until death.

I have said we can hear no sound in the fields where we have dug our winter holes: no bells, no dogs, no roosters. Spring and

summer have come without bringing back any of these sounds. There is a church bell not far away, but it is shattered and on the ground. The soldiers cut pieces from it and convert them into rings, which are more popular than those made of aluminium. There is a dog quite near here. While I am writing he keeps watch from the parapet of a listening post, but he is not allowed to bark. His assignment is to scent the enemy, point him, and keep quiet. As for the roosters, I admit that, a few days ago, I thought they had come back. Some Hessian guardsmen, opposite, were awakening and imitating animal cries. The French infantry answered with such enthusiasm that on each side and from trench to trench the cock's crow might have been heard, that morning, to our left as far as the sea; to our right as far as Belfort.

And yet, one day in February, there arose a voice from the dead earth. It has continued to sound ever since, at dawn, thus enchanting our solitude. It is the voice of the lark.

Once, at daybreak, while in one of those first muddy shelters that we built so crudely, I thought I heard the song of a

bird. It might have been a man, whistling in his cave, but the notes were too pure and fresh, and followed one another too rapidly. They grew in volume, and little by little, spreading over the plain, filled our desolated sky with such joy that I went out and stayed a long time motionless, listening.

"It is pretty, my Lieutenant!"

Next to me I perceived the smiling face of my orderly. Was it to hear or to see better that the good fellow was showing his teeth so? He seemed to be in ecstasy.

Since that day the larks have become our friends. No person ever comes to see us at the front. These little birds alone link us to the rest of the world. How could we help loving them? They are all we have.

Was it the novelty of it which caused our admiration the first time we heard the concert? It was a new pleasure, but our emotion came from a more profound source. Our souls are able to participate in great events which they cannot see. Sometimes we have a vision and suddenly the magnitude of the scene before us and the significance of our acts appear to us. Outside of these minutes, when we know how to live, we

act with the simplicity of children. The latter are wise without knowing it, for by means of their little virtues they are preparing, that wonder of God, a beautiful life. We are disciplined and attentive to our military duties, but careless of the rest, and we are scarcely conscious of the fact that we are writing an epic.

It is better thus. But it is also a good thing sometimes that a shock awakens our slumbering spirits. Contrasts give us this shock. When suddenly we perceive the mediocrity of a being or an object which we considered very important, our nerves contract and we penetrate to the depths of human misery. When a lark flies over a battlefield it reveals the sweetness of life to people who had become familiar with the neighbourhood of death. They look and listen enchanted and, if they cast their eyes down, they realize in a minute all the horror of the place where they are living, all the savage beauty of the task they are accomplishing. That is why the heart beats at such moments and why this soldier who had always seen so many larks before the war without noticing them, here, in the trench, remarks: "It is pretty, that song."

Certain larks are closer to our hearts than others; some, although less accessible, are more touching. Our best companions are those who dwell in the clover behind our lines. They live near us on ground that we have kept for them with the rampart of our bodies. They are the first to benefit from the protection we give to all that France of which the valleys and plains stretch from us to the ocean. They are the outpost of the hard-working country that we defend. Hard working themselves, attentive to their daily needs, they are charming housekeepers, who come and go, chattering as they do their work. They do not make any pretences, they do not flutter like those crazy swallows, which we never see here and which we will find only when we return again to our homes, God knows when! They are sweetness and grace itself, and when they mount in the sky so high that our eyes, although long accustomed to discovering the aeroplanes, can no longer follow them, we feel that they do not realize the beauty of their flight, so simple and naïve is the note that falls from their throats.

In front of our lines, between the Germans

and us, live the tragic larks. How many times have I not looked at those little creatures who stay on in spite of the horror about them, and who sing even above death? They show us the vanity of human quarrels. Some Germans and French are fighting: what is that to them as long as the sun rises and the earth, neglected though it be by ungrateful and quarrelsome man, provides the food for their little ones? When from the parapet of the trench one contemplates the mysterious plain where the soldiers of the most formidable armies of the world are hidden what a surprise it is to see a cheerful little bird suddenly emerge, hop about, turn somersaults, and suddenly fly away, transporting us with it toward the sky. These French larks are so alert and quick to conquer the skies, right in front of the enemy, that with very little imagination we make them the emblem of our race, impulsive but well poised, ingenious and merry, singing and rising at the same time, and like them we also shall be victorious.

We love our larks as the messengers of glory, prophets of all good news. It was their note which warned us of the spring-

time while we were still bending our backs under the weight of winter, and I must tell you of the signal they give us every morning.

Imagine a night in the trench and the night guard, up listening. The fusillade is almost continuous. It decreases sometimes and begins again, suddenly, no one knows why. Our men respond but little. What would be the use? Ceaselessly the Germans send up illuminating rockets. With great speed they rush upward, giving a vivid light for fifty or sixty metres of their course and then die down. The light given by ours is not so penetrating but lasts longer. They remain suspended from a light parachute and during seconds which seem interminable project on the grass a pale light. The vegetation seems to become animated and sinister shadows seem to move in front of our lines. Our men shoot at these phantoms and on the other side the rifles go off, too, but toward the sky. The Germans, who never miss an occasion to practise, are aiming at the fuses. It makes one think of boys at a fair, trying to shoot an egg dancing on a jet of water.

All that noise has nothing bellicose about it. Sometimes the artillery thunders. If

it is ours, we inevitably say: "They are getting the worst of it."

If it is theirs, one doesn't laugh quite so much, but one finds, even then, words of consolation.

"I hear we need more aluminium for our rings. We have ordered some from the Boches; they are good business men and they are filling the order immediately."

The hours are long. Cold, obscurity, silence, immobility, and danger tire even the most courageous. Formerly, in peace time, when on guard, one could always tell the time by the convent bells. Here there is nothing of the sort, and nearly all our watches are broken! When will the day come? With bent backs and our brown rugs folded in two or four over our heads and shoulders, we walk in Indian file, stamping our feet, taking ten steps to the right, then all together, after an "about face," ten to the left. Suddenly we hear a muffled roar. We stop and listen. It is a strong cannonade over there toward the north. After a few minutes of attention, a few comments on the war, and always a few jokes, too, we resume with a sigh the muddy promenade, waiting for the divine morning hour.

Daylight means release. The cooks will bring hot soup and coffee. Life will resume its course. The trench, in a few minutes, will be cleaned and swept like a barrack corridor. The number of men on guard duty will be reduced. We will breathe once more.

And yet light is not coming. The sun which ought to appear behind the German lines remains hidden. It is two o'clock: the corporal has said so. One leans against the parapet, with eyes lost in the gray sky, and a heavy soul.

Suddenly a chirp, then another, then several. Thank the Lord the larks are waking! Is it possible? The dawn has not yet appeared, but happiness enters our hearts, as when at school the pupils hear the liberating bell. It is necessary to have been on watch like this during long nights in front of the enemy to know the intoxicating beauty of the sun's rising, accompanied by the song of the lark, and to love forever those charming birds, heralds of all glories: the spring, the day, and—God permitting—victory.

There are other creatures around us, but silent and terrified ones. These are

not sacred, and the soldier who has a rifle and knows how to use it watches for them and from his hole shoots them without a permit. The listening posts, in front of the lines, are wonderful for that. The art consists in shooting the partridges through the head. It is very easy for those who know how. If one misses one's aim, one smiles and hopes that the bullet was not entirely wasted, and that perhaps over there some German may have found himself in the right place to receive it. It is nothing to kill a partridge: but in order to eat it it is necessary to go and bring it in from the grass, straight in front of the enemy. Some of the men, who would perhaps make a grimace if they were told to crawl out to observe or listen, jump on the parapet and on all fours, madly imprudent, laughing at everything—the Boches and themselves—run toward the little prey, put it in their pocket, and come back nearly as happy as if they had won the *croix de guerre*.

One day a great big chap, a renowned shot, noticed that the beet-stalks were moving. He pushed his neighbour's elbow:

"A Boche, there, look!"

"A Boche? You are crazy! It is a hare."

"I believe it is a Boche and so"—boom!

I must tell you that, two days before, it had been forbidden to shoot at game on account of wasting ammunition. He shot and killed a splendid hare, and, his hour of watch over, brought it to us.

The funny part is that the next day the *Bulletin* brought news of the punishment of a man from another company who had done exactly the same thing: "has wasted two bullets on a hare in spite of strict orders against shooting published in the order of the day."

That same evening the Colonel, while going through our trench, saw a beautiful skin hanging by our door. He opened wide his eyes and asked:

"What did you give the man who killed that for you?"

"Five *sous*, Colonel."

"It is not too much. As for the other unlucky man who got punished, I'll have the offence changed. I'll say: 'Has missed a hare.' That's well worth four days' confinement."

"Quite so, Colonel."

Of what other birds, what other game can I speak to you? There are no crows

around here, only the empty nest of one. The bird has not appeared since we came here. Its nest is very important; it is a strategical point. When we studied history, we imagined the great warriors of olden days, pale from bending over maps, their eyes fixed on fortified cities and narrow passes. Here it is in front of a tiny manure heap, which is flattening itself out and disappearing as the months go by, and a tree, at the top of which is a crow's nest, that we are stopped. In all the military conversations, whether one is speaking of patrols, reconnoitring, attacks, or the regulation of artillery fire, the "crow's nest" and the little "manure heap" recur, constantly, like a *leit motiv.* It makes us modest and that is a good thing. I am always so afraid that after the war those who will have the joy of being still alive will think themselves extraordinary men and become insufferable. For my part, if people ask me to tell about my great deeds of valour and I am tempted to glorify myself, I will at once think of the crow's nest, and if they insist, of the manure heap.

If people remark later that the war was ugly, those who took part in it will say that

at least the poppies in front of the trenches were not ugly. The battlefield poppies will remain in our eyes throughout our life as the lark's song will remain in our ears!

Have you, Madame, received from your son or husband; or you, Mademoiselle, from your fiancé—from the one for whom your heart beats—a war poppy, spread out on a white sheet of paper with a name and a date? If so, guard that beautiful red stain as piously as a relic.

I first saw the dazzling vision of the war poppies about a hundred yards back of the line, near a camp. We were going out from a village, a comrade and I. Just as we had passed the last house, a huge, bright red field appeared in the valley near by.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed my companion.

I looked at him, then at the poppies.

"You are joking?"

"Not at all! Those are weeds! Hideous!"

One becomes an officer in war time, but one has a profession in civil life. My friend, although a very good officer, always remained the scientific farmer he had once been.

"Monsieur, the agriculturist," I replied: "your words are undoubtedly true. That beautiful thing is a field of desolation, but all the same I find it wonderful. Look again!"

I explained that it was beautiful in the same way that a painting is beautiful. The argument proved convincing and I felt proud of having found it. Our eyes have contracted a sense of colour that Nature rarely offends. Beautiful and rich enough, without resorting to the bizarre, she charms us without effort and we sense all the beautiful secrets that each season has brought forth unchangingly since the beginning of the world. The artist, less powerful and less disinterested, in order to captivate our interest, must resort to some artifice, which is not always successful. The most common of these consists in throwing extraordinary colour combinations before our eyes. Thus each year, in the art exhibits, one sees purple, yellow, and red tints, which rarely exist under the true sun in the fields. One of those red tints, unknown to us in peace, because it was then intermingled with the mellowness of the wheat, has now rapidly extended into great blood-red carpets before our eyes. When a painter dares

to do as much, one smiles. If it is Nature, one admires!

When we went back to the first line at the time of the great battles in Artois, I was glad to see the poppies growing even there, in front of the trenches. They enchanted our eyes, and it was through that intrinsically worthless but strikingly beautiful vegetation that our soldiers, gay cavaliers, went forward to the assault. Can one say that those scarlet harvests were worthless? Is it nothing to have cheered the last glance of so many sons of France? The neglected earth, unable to produce wheat to nourish our bodies, gave us rays of triumphal light for the joy of our souls. During days of mourning beautiful things are revolting. But the war, through which we are living, instead of weakening our souls, exalts them. While we sadly draw black veils over the remains of our brothers in arms, God, who knows better than we how to honour the dead, bestows upon them a profusion of war flowers, mingling their red colour with the blood of our martyrs.

A thousand other flowers spring up around our trenches. One day a little girl, eager to serve France in her own way, told

her mother to ask me to send her the name of a poor soldier to adopt as her godchild. I got hold of a good fellow whose family lives in a province occupied by the Germans, and I started a correspondence between my little French girl and this pleasing but uncultivated godchild. The letters and presents began pouring in! The soldier was delighted. He said to me:

"She wants me to write her the names of my children. I'll send them to her in a letter." Then he added: "If you don't object, my Lieutenant, I could perhaps send her a flower?"

A week later the little godmother told me that she was astonished at the pretty thoughts the soldiers have, and that her godchild had sent her a beautiful golden flower.

The flower was one of those common wild ones which are unknown to city people, like me, by name, but which we love to find growing in the fields in springtime. The flower was enclosed with a long, poetic letter from her godchild that the dear child sent me.

I had seen my man that very morning, leaning over a parapet, in one of the back

trenches, scribbling big, ill-shaped letters on a white sheet of paper.

"It makes you sweat, old man."

"Rather, my Lieutenant."

"When you dig, you don't get so hot?"

"Well, no, sir."

Was this simple being, then, capable of writing pretty things? I opened the precious paper, sent by the child, and saw capital letters traced artistically. My eyes fell on this sentence with dismay: "With my hand on my heart, Mademoiselle, and dear godmother, I place at your knees, rather at your feet, this emblem of your simple grace."

The monster of duplicity, aided by the "writer" of the squad, had copied his letter out of a manual for correspondence, called "*Le parfait Secretaire*" and had deceived my honest little girl. I was tempted to be severe with him, but, after all, in this case the letter mattered so little! Upon thinking it over, this rough man's action seemed to me full of grace. He knew the rules of gallantry well enough to pluck a flower and offer it to his lady.

There came a day when we must ruthlessly cut the high grass and with it the flowers.

All that vegetation hid the enemy's positions and allowed him to crawl nearly up to us without being discovered. One morning we heard that the company was going to be sent two scythes. These new weapons were received in the commanding post with much respect by a comrade and myself. Neither of us had ever encountered such a tool face to face! I won't say we felt frightened: we were more like chickens who had found a toothbrush. That same evening we began to clear the ground in front of the parapet. Of course, the scythes were broken during the first night. Then we were given sickles to use. They were all right for the grass, but would not cut the tough beet-stalks and the men had to use their shovels. The real difficulty was encountered when they came to the barbed-wire entanglement.

You must imagine a moonless night in the fields. No lamp posts here or lighted shop windows. The star shells make a lot of light but only for the benefit of our backs, for when we hear the slight noise they make in starting, we immediately throw ourselves flat on the ground with our chins in the mud. You will say: "Why don't you

work when the moon is up?" Unfortunately the moon is thoughtless and sheds her rays indiscriminately. When she is there the Germans see our silhouettes as plainly as we see theirs, and the only thing we can all do is to go back and hide. It is so dark sometimes that it is impossible to see a yard in front of one: then it is useless to try to put a hand through the barbed-wire entanglement to cut the grass and flowers.

One morning at daybreak I came out of my hole and could see nothing but fog. From the firing trench one saw barely ten yards across the plain. At that hour the men are tired out, and they have every right to be. Yet I was greatly tempted to make use of this piece of luck and have the men, under cover of the fog bank, go out and remove the waving green screen growing in the defensive barriers. I got hold of a shovel, jumped on the parapet, and said to one or two of the men:

"Follow me."

A quarter of an hour later twenty men had joined me and the work was quickly done.

Opposite we could hear plainly the blows of mallets. The Germans were putting

up stakes in front of their lines. Only the night before a corporal had come and told the commandant of our company:

"My Lieutenant, the plain is full of Boches. We ought to ask for the artillery."

Our friend, being a practical man, had answered:

"Leave the Boches alone. We also want to be left alone when we work on the barbed wire."

An hour later a volley came from a German post, in the direction of our workmen. It might have been a mistake, but more probably the enemy pioneers had finished their own work, and no longer needed protection for themselves.

That foggy morning seemed to me favourable for revenge. I got all my men together and, to the great joy of those bearded children, said that we were going to administer punishment to the people opposite. But an inspiration came to me suddenly. What if by an unhappy chance there were some of our men in the field behind us? They would receive the sharp reply of the German rifles.

"Go and see," I said to a soldier. He came running and shouted to me:

"Don't fire, sir, our whole company is out!"

"Are you mad?"

"Not more than usual. They are searching for shell fuses."

The fog then began to lift. For fifty meters around we could see our men, bent double, scrutinizing the ground. Here and there groups of three or four were climbing out of huge shell-holes. Others, stick in hand, solemnly, like magicians, were pushing aside the grass as they walked. Usually at that early hour, having just swallowed a hot meal, they are sleeping soundly. But that day it was a question of getting some aluminium to make those little rings that they send to their wives, sisters, mothers, cousins, and fiancées. Soldiers are poets.

I had to order them in. To console them I ordered the promised volley.

"It will make them jump, my Lieutenant!"

I don't know if many Germans danced, but I do know that they fired back at us furiously for a time. One would have believed it to be an attack, and my comrades, awakened abruptly, could have strangled me for the false alarm. Thus

ends my little story of grass cutting and fog: a few flowers less, a few rings more.

Is it necessary to tell you about the beet-plants? Ah! They will leave recollections in our senses: touch, vision, and smell. During this war we have been saturated with beet-roots. Even our feet know them, those cursed things. I don't wish any civilian ever to repeat our night walks among these treacherous and slippery stalks. The strongest among us broke their legs at that work.

At night they were a perfect nightmare, during the early days of the campaign. Their dark foliage was continually mistaken for German silhouettes. One of my young friends, who really has never known fear, said to me the other day:

"Only once have I ever made the complete sacrifice of my life. I was in front of my section, and suddenly about ten feet away I saw a line of enemy riflemen. I told my men to lie down, I looked closely, and very clearly made out moving helmets. I took the only possible course and tried bluff. Alone, revolver in hand, I threw myself forward, shouting in German with all my strength: 'Surrender! You are

prisoners!' There were only beet-stalks, their heads nodding in the wind."

There can be only one pleasant recollection of the beet-plant: its perfume.

One dreadfully hot June day I was hastening through the *boyaux* to join the officers of a neighbouring company, about five hundred metres from my post. One's chief wish for such paths in summer is that they might be rendered odourless. Vain wish when it is a much-frequented way. There are always dead rats, or garbage, insufficiently covered, rotting at the bottom. Bags of lime and buckets of disinfectants are emptied in the main and cross trenches frequently to safeguard the men's health. It is useless, however, to try to please their nostrils. The vegetation of the field hung down above my head and flimsy plants caressed my face to the right and left. Suddenly the air that I breathed seemed charged with honey. Little by little the sensation became so strong that I was almost intoxicated. I shut my eyes in order to enjoy that wonderful feeling more freely. Was I in Greece, inhaling the wonderful odours of Mount Hymette? A shell came and awoke me from my dream with its

unpleasant noise. I lifted myself up to look at the fields. Beet-plants gone to seed were the only visible objects. On their high, bushy stems, millions of little green bells, flowers or seeds—I hardly knew which —were warming themselves in the midday sun. They smelt wonderfully sweet. Henceforth a thousand recollections of the war will come to me whenever I smell a cake made with honey.

Whenever my eyes shall rest on the nest of a mouse the recollections will be less cheerful, but the effect will be the same. I write "mouse" as an euphemism. I mean all those small, unclean animals which are commonly called moles, field-mice, and rats of various sizes. At first we knew little of our companions of misfortune. The first visitors in our caves were the earth worms. I remember we were sitting in the dugout one day, on rickety chairs, which once belonged to the Boche and before that to our civilian population. Our backs were jammed against the wall, while in front we were nearly cut in two by the edge of the table. The opposite wall of damp earth was scarcely more than two feet away. The only light was from a candle of bad quality



planted in a niche of the wall. Our menu contained cold fried potatoes (which is sad) and cold mashed potatoes (which is even sadder). All of a sudden a lump of earth fell in my pewter plate. We lifted our heads and there beheld, emerging from the earth, a little, wriggling worm, hanging like a pink tear.

"Quick, a match!"

An orderly scratched a match and approached the hanging shred. We laughed like children. The creature was not accustomed to fire and acted like a puppy. It contracted and disappeared with such funny quick movements that the effect on our nerves was electrical. Entire matchboxes have been consumed in this manner. Sometimes, when officers and orderlies were heaped together in the same dugout, beginning to get bored, one of the soldiers would say: "Ah, now we are going to laugh."

He would take the candle and pass it along the walls. As each worm hastily withdrew, without waiting for farewells, peals of laughter would arise and the time would pass more quickly afterward.

Now the worms no longer come to our beautiful, comfortable shelters. Instead



we have moles in our *boyaux*. Lying on their backs, their little pink claws open, these dead animals have a better appearance than that of their cousins, the field-mice. Their round bodies, short and fat like frankfurt sausages, are entirely covered with silky fur. They look as if they were kittens. The mouth, a white spot about the neck, is all that can be seen of their funny little faces. Why all these little corpses every morning in the *boyaux?* They fall into these long corridors and are unable to escape the brutal feet of the soldiers. I should have thought them intelligent enough to get away by digging if they could not by running. Beside them lie quantities of crushed and disembowelled field-mice. They are no uglier to behold, ladies, than the horses of the *picadores* in the Spanish bull rings.

The military authority who watches over the hygienic condition of the troops appoints a soldier called the *taupier* (mole killer), one for each *boyau*, whose business it is to take away all the dead animals and to bury them every morning. I know a ladies' hair dresser who accomplishes, with much distinction, this warlike function and

who certainly won't reveal the fact to his fair clients after the war.

Strange little animals! The war has multiplied them. The bread, the remains of meat and vegetables that the men throw around the camps and trenches, have already stuffed several generations of rodents. Finding life good they have reproduced themselves rapidly. In the villages, rats as large as cats prowl continually in the barns where the soldiers are sleeping.

"They look like calves, Captain."

The person to whom this remark was addressed smiled.

"You exaggerate, my boy."

"Not much, my Captain. But those mere animals won't bother me after all that I have seen."

In the little room where I go every now and then to take my royal slumbers I noticed that I disturb the mice quite a little. I minded them at first, from force of habit. Now I let them play around me. Only once have I thought them too presuming. One of them had just run across my face, I still can feel the light touch of its little feet against my cheek. Another one was turning somersaults in my empty

basin, out of which it was trying to climb; the most practical one of the three was devouring my new sponge. Do you think that in time of peace and in civil life I should have tolerated such manners? The war has made philosophers of us all.

The field mice are less fortunate. The trenches attract them, but to their doom. For them a trench is a formidable precipice. They climb down the sloping side of a ditch with difficulty, but the side of a *boyau* is vertical, and the animals who are out hunting at night have tragic falls when they attempt its descent. On arriving at the bottom a little stunned, they begin to look for some exit. Gradually they lose courage and putting their front paws on the wall, their little pointed faces turned toward the sky, frantically attempt to leap out. Many times under the beam of my electric lamp I have seen these terrified little animals madly running back and forth, throwing themselves at the side walls, jumping to the right and left, and even under my feet if I had not been careful to avoid them. The soldiers do not take the same trouble. It is simply: "Crunch! Another one!"

At the war one does not wear thin shoes, nor wipe one's feet on Persian rugs on the way out of the *boyaux*.

The dead mice play such an important part, even in the thoughts of the high command, that one day the chief of a neighbouring battalion sent by his aide-de-camp to the captain of a company at the front a note running thus: "Urgent! There is a dead rat in the *boyaux*. Please explain!" It was necessary to take a sheet of paper and make a formal reply. An inquiry was made and it was discovered that the rat was a field mouse, which had fallen in the *boyau* after the prescribed hour. The *taupier* passes, according to orders, before eight in the morning. After that hour there is not a dead animal about. We had to own that that morning the company had been presented with an extra field mouse and that we had not paid any attention to the fact. Bad business!

All these little beasts that have been our companions in misery will be remembered with a mixture of repulsion and tenderness. I was wandering last night in a section of trench when close by my ear a tuft of grass began to move. I turned quickly and

found myself confronted by a funny little mouse. It is impossible to imagine anything more odd than our ceremonious interview. I kept serious. She watched me intently with her beady eyes, sitting on her haunches, her ears erect, her nose moving. She was trying to understand, and really so was I. She seemed to say:

"What are we both doing here?"

"Well, mouse, I believe we are both waiting for some violent death and that I am as miserable as you. With all my pride and this uniform, once handsome, but now covered with dust and mud, I am of no more worth on this earth than your little gray, trembling body. Then don't be frightened by my moustache or my big shoes; let us be friends!"

"Let us be friends," she seemed to reply, nodding her head.

"Good-night, little friend. If I come out of this I promise that in my soldier's heart you shall share a corner with the larks and the poppies."

VII

Strength

THIS war reminds us that physical strength is a desirable quality.

For a long time we had been taught the contrary. Under the socialistic teachings of the Rights of Man one had neither desire nor encouragement to become strong. Beings, conscious of the superiority of reason, saw no necessity for a strong body and did not desire to see men of that type around them. They took pride in their physical weakness because it made their intellectual power more striking. Truth was ruler and Mars lay groaning under her heel. Our wise men disdained the argument of force and no doubt thought themselves superior to that law.

There are natural laws, one of which encourages the strong to crush the weak. These laws are written in the book of

Science. Assuredly these opponents of Force know Science for they are always speaking about it. Have they never learned from it the action of Forces, and that in the relations of these forces to each other the most vigorous dominate and destroy the others? In the physiological order of things, one gives to this same phenomenon the name of the Survival of the Fittest. How Nature makes use of force does not seem to have arrested the attention of our philosophers. Anxious to find only demonstrable truths, they ignore one of the most certain. They idolize progress and refuse to see that its last word is the apotheosis of the strong. The mildest thing one can say is that they are inconsistent when they profess both love of science and contempt of strength at the same time.

They dislike force because it is a reality which obstinately intrudes upon their dreams. They have decreed fraternity between people and that the independence of Nations is sacred. The war is their answer.

It is the same thing when it comes to individual strength. They have instituted equality. A man striving for equality does not want to be outrun or to outrun anyone

himself. He is free, but on condition that he respect the jealously guarded liberty of others. These are fine theories, but if one solitary individual trains his muscles, he can upset them all.

For that reason envy is always on guard against strong people. Unhappily, those who are really superior are always the first suspects; while the field remains clear for those desirous of usurping power. When the war broke out we were living under the rule of brigands, plutocrats, cynics, and rhetoricians. They fell furiously upon the beneficial forces, while the evil ones strengthened themselves.

The war will put everything back in its place and the just will render to strength the attention which it deserves.

There exists no essential opposition between right and force. A man who is right is worthy of respect. If he prove himself physically strong, he becomes splendid. His arms serve his spirit and his physical power enhances his moral power.

Muscular strength does not necessarily involve intellectual debility nor does moral strength gain by physical weakness. Athletes are not necessarily imbeciles, nor are

scientific people necessarily weaklings. One sees men with low foreheads parading in circuses, yet the most intelligent wrestlers are, after all, the best, and the reasoning of a man with a sound body inspires me with as much confidence as that of a man with a feeble one. The health of the body and that of the mind are naturally linked together. I love strength because I love health.

What disgrace to our philosophers that in the years just preceding the war the best youths of our country disowned their teachings and became, not only religious and patriotic but reasonable and strong! When that reawakening, increased tenfold by the virtues learned from the battlefield, shall have produced its far-reaching effects, it will be interesting to search for its far-removed causes. I am sure it will be found that one of them is the taste the children of this generation have acquired for physical culture, beginning in their earliest years.

Here at the front I most admire our young soldiers. A considerable gathering in the camp attracted my attention the other day. Last winter I had seen the

same number of men crowded into a smoky and odorous inn. Through the windows I had heard the nasal voice of some soldier comedian singing an absurd refrain. This time there was neither a word nor a sound. The whole village square was occupied by blue-gray soldiers standing in a circle and watching intently.

"It's Courbier who is wrestling."

"Is he good?"

"Wonderful!"

"Let us pass."

They stepped aside and we pushed our way through the dense crowd. Courbier was an infantryman and the camp was full of artillerymen who were looking on with profound admiration—the first reason for pride. He belonged to my regiment and to my company; supreme satisfaction! How handsome he was as he fought, stripped to the waist—his limbs supple, his eyes bright! I was, in particular, struck by the tranquillity of his face, which remained always the same even when downing his breathless opponent. Real strength gives one a serenity which resembles that of happiness, even during the greatest activity. One after another the strong men presented

themselves, removed their shirts, exhibited their muscles, frowned, and were thrown by this handsome lad. The audience applauded. The performance over, everyone shouted praises of the victor and spoke of his marvellous exploits. These French, who are supposed to be envious, loved the strength of their comrade.

Why haven't they developed their muscles in the same manner? They did not lack the desire: but their teachers had other things in mind for them to do. For fifty years sophisms and alcohol have been distributed everywhere. Our race would be a fine one if it had not been spoiled in that way. The more profound attributes are being reborn in the war; the blood is regaining its colour and its richness. Men of thirty-five, old before their time, are being rejuvenated little by little. The corporal whose duty it is to parade the sick every morning for medical inspection very often has nothing to do. How easy it would be to set free the strength now merely latent in these men.

They delighted me especially one January morning. The desolate little village which was to be our home for three days was

covered with snow. Big shells, bursting here and there, were making enormous spots on the roads and in the gardens, like blots on a white page. We went out during a quiet spell and one of us hearing shrieks from a farmyard, ran to investigate and came back saying:

"Come quick, there is such a fight going on!"

It was a fight truly. I found the men of my section, old and young, "firing at will"—using all their strength. Ammunition was plentiful; they only had to stoop and fill their big hands with snow. The balls thrown with a powerful sweep of the arm were finding their target against the backs or heads of comrades from another section. A bearded corporal, usually silent and sedate, was shouting and running about more than any of the others.

"How is it," I said to him, "that you, too, are fighting?"

"They are Boches, my Lieutenant."

"But you are tired out . . ."

"Never mind; it is war—and we'll get them yet!"

I don't know which side "got" the other. We stayed quite a long time, delighting in

this extraordinary spectacle. Poilus are usually represented as shapeless, muddy, and heavy. They can be handsome, too, these "types"—when they want to be.

I found beauty in the ugliest man of my company one day. A *réformé*, with only slight training for the military service, had been sent to us in the spring. He bore on his face and form the signs of alcoholic heredity.

After a few weeks the commander of his section declared that, although physically a runt, he would become an attentive and courageous soldier. I questioned him several times, but in vain. He answered like a half-witted person and I wondered how that creature, mentally and physically imperfect, could hold his place. But one day I found him in a *boyau* with a shovel in his hand. He had taken off his coat, his shirt was open, his sleeves rolled up, his cap on the back of his head. His hair was matted on his forehead by perspiration. I was struck by the easy movements with which he took the heavy earth that his comrade had dug, and threw it out on the top of the bank with his shovel. It seemed as if he were using his muscles with artistic per-

fection for the joy of my eyes. There is no dance as graceful as the gesture of the blacksmith beating the anvil, or that of the ploughman wrestling with the earth. Without his strength this poor wretch would be only a waif, unworthy of living. He has not succumbed to his intellectual misery and the apparent decrepitude of his physique, because when very young he was taught how to use a shovel. He will carry the imprint of his father's faults and vices to his grave but, because his muscles have been cultivated, a little beauty will always shine under the repellent mask which marks his origin.

It is natural that we should love strength here. Success on the battlefield goes to the most daring, but only if his limbs be trained to serve his courage. The war is a school for the soul and for the body. We are not good soldiers because our cause is just, but because we have clear minds backed by solid fists.

When I was twenty I prepared for my degree at the "Faculté d' Aix." One evening a friend and I were conversing under the ancient trees of the Cours Mirabeau. We were wishing for a war. We were talk-

ing philosophy instead of politics. We felt that life was too soft and were trying to find a means of giving back courage to the men of our time and to ourselves, who were no better than the others. We came to the conclusion that, at the bottom of human cowardice, there lies an instinct which God has put in our souls but which we must not abuse: the instinct of self preservation. In order to remain alive and to preserve our precious flesh from every scratch we have made life comfortable. The aim of our ambition has become material well-being, and happiness means a bed of cotton wool.

"To that, my friend, there is but one remedy: let us charge the Prussian bayonets with uncovered breasts."

"And be pierced by them?"

"Oh, no! We will bayonet them! But when one has been ready to sacrifice one's life, one no longer finds one's happiness only in sleeping comfortably, but in living bravely."

Thus the constant protection of his body abases man. When his skin has met trial by fire and weapon, he becomes once more a noble creature.

Since that day I have conceived a great respect for strength, without which courage is useless. This youthful conversation has left an imperishable trace on my soul. I still remember the name of my friend but I do not know how life has dealt with him. If he is serving to-day, with what ardour must he be fighting and offering his life!

The strength of a nation is made up of the strength of its individuals. At this solemn hour when it is a question of winning from the German race—so numerous, so methodically trained—our past faults hang like weights on our arms. But we are a strong people whom we have vainly tried to degrade. We will dominate the enemy, and when we have obtained peace, we shall know how to prevent the misuse of our power.

To our misfortune and that of Europe we disdained strength. If we had called columns of robust men to support immortal France and if, with strong arms and sound brain we had demonstrated our valour, it is doubtful whether the nations would be at war now.

Those among us who return will teach their sons the value and beauty of strength.

VIII

"The God of the Armies"

AN OFFICER entered the cathedral of A—— at six in the morning. At eleven he would be in his trench at the front. He must remain there fifteen days—fifteen days without being able to seek religious comfort save in the little church of C—— where he was usually quartered. His train was due to leave in forty minutes. He had time only to pass rapidly through the wonderful building, to say a short prayer, and fly. But the grandeur of the place arrested him. The day was barely breaking and had not yet penetrated these vaults. At the end of the immense nave the flame of a candle flickered. By its light a priest was officiating, alone and distant. His face came out in black against the brightly lighted page of the prayer book. A soldier was moving near him, giving the

responses. An old woman was dusting a few chairs. It was the right time and the right place to approach God for whom all souls are longing during these tragic days. The booted visitor postponed his examination of the cathedral until another time. He had broken his fast, but the fasting law had been abolished for those who are fighting. He searched his conscience rather rapidly, in a soldierly manner, and approached the old woman.

"A confessor please, Madame."

"At this hour? What are you thinking about?"

"Why not at this hour?"

"There is only the vicar here now and he is saying mass: surely you can wait?"

Charming creature! He looked at her without exhibiting his distaste. There is always an advantage in keeping calm in adversity and his wisdom was at once rewarded.

"There is a soldier over there if you insist. He is a priest." The officer was for a moment a trifle upset, and stood considering.

"All right," he said, "ask him."

The old woman trotted off to get the poilu

who, on his knees, was praying in the rear of a column. After a few words with him she signalled to the officer to go into the vestry.

The latter found the soldier awaiting him, standing at attention. He timidly lifted his bearded face and saluted; then squarely meeting the eyes of his superior, said:

"My Lieutenant, here it is."

He pointed to a devotional chair, and the penitent having saluted in his turn fell on his knees.

Never had the words of absolution seemed more sacred. I do not wish to play upon the emotion of the reader by speaking of the tears of the officer as romantic writers would do. The fact is, nevertheless, that they were burning his eyelids when the priest said softly:

"Go in peace, my son, and pray for me."

Immediately after these words the priest stood up, and heels together, head erect, saluted. The officer returned his salute gravely.

A few moments later he had received communion and we met at the station.

We boarded the same train. I had just been enjoying two days leave of absence. I

had been home, kissed my children, and now was on my way back to the firing line, like a child returning to boarding school. But one is reasonable at my age and instead of moaning at the new separation, which might prove a long, perhaps even an eternal one, I was living over, in rapture, the hours that I had just enjoyed. The train stopped—necessarily so, as the next station was in the hands of the Germans. We started on foot toward the camp. Lost in thought, we were walking at a good pace, along a road bordered with hedges, when a terrific noise suddenly startled us out of our revery. Two hundred yards away a 105-millimetre shell had just burst. Thus the war tore us away from our pleasant dreams and impressed its violence on our senses and in our souls.

At the risk of astonishing you, I must tell you how we felt, believe me who will.

We both saluted war as an old friend—lost and found once more! Our cheerfulness was so great that I was at first ashamed of it. Then I remembered how once, after a long voyage during which I had run considerable risk and experienced exceptional emotions, my heart had sunk when the

port of Dunkirk had appeared in the distance under a peaceful sky.

It was that same phenomenon, but this time inverted: with the same cause, only the taste for danger.

We all hate the whistle of the bullets, and yet the daylight has barely left before we climb out on the trench parapet. The feeling experienced in facing peril; the pride that one takes in holding oneself erect, without bending an inch, in the fields where the simplest prudence commands one to lie flat on the ground, have nothing to do with heroism. The chauffeur who risks his life for the pleasure of speeding is not called heroic. I recognize in my desire for danger the liking for forbidden fruit, and perhaps there is more vice than virtue about it.

However, I am thankful to say that I found something else, more noble in our joy at again encountering war, that day.

The ordinary coat and bowler hat are exceedingly ugly. When one has for many months seen only soldiers in uniform, civilian garb appears ridiculous. I well remember the stupefaction with which I gazed on the first civilian I encountered

after long months at the front. With two comrades from the engineering corps, I had just arrived at A—— by motor-car.

"Gracious, how ugly!" said one.

"And to think that when peace comes we will have to go back to that!" said the other.

It is impossible to deny that, in some ways, war is a more noble spectacle than peace. It is beautiful in the same way that a great fire may be beautiful. Nature is beautiful in spite of her peacefulness, but a city in peace mars its beauty with mediocrity and vice. If immodesty in the dress of women, and hideousness in that of men, are manifestations of Peace, then war is preferable.

I came back to war as to the most thrilling of spectacles. The whole world is eagerly watching it. Those in the first row are the only ones who really see it, and I am going to resume my place there. The front is the special gallery in which the privileged ones are allowed to stand, while the crowd is struggling to see from the rear. For two days I had turned away from that choice position and already my frivolous brain had assumed other cares. The bursting

of the shell was like the gavel of the stage manager, and my soul became attentive once more. However, it could remain pious, too, because the war stimulates the soul and helps it to ascend from the dust. Upward, toward what? Happy those who believe in God. I pity those who do not. Some of them are the victims of despair; while some instead of putting their trust in the Master, as we all ought to do, put it in empty words in which they find no comfort.

Enemies of God do not exist at the front; they are found only behind it. Anti-clericalism begins timidly back toward the kitchens. It is a little bolder around the supply depots and I learn by letters from the rear that it is loudest in the cafés in the provinces. From the Lys to the Vosges it is unknown.

It is undoubtedly the nearness of our neighbour, Death, which has accomplished this miracle. It may not seem a noble thing or creditable to religion for one to turn toward it only in times of fear or danger of death. Sailors are supposed to be more devout than other men because they are exposed to more risks, yet I have known an old sea captain who believed neither in

God nor Devil. I was on board his ship one day crossing the Raz-de-Sein. He, too, loved danger and, although it was an imprudence, in order to gain a little time he took the shortest route and risked the loss of his ship. Never have I heard a man swear as he did that day. I was young and unable to understand how a man could be blasphemous while facing death.

Take other examples which will bring you back to the war. Do you consider all the victorious armies which have made history for France aggregations of saints? Do you think that the *grognards* of Napoleon painted by Raffet have devout faces? If Virtue, caught in a trap, begged you to offer her a refuge, would you dare take her to a soldiers' camp?

No, it is not danger which lifts one toward God, nor is it even the fear of death. During our entire life we are in danger, and death spies upon us, beginning at the cradle. We are aware of it, but few of us give it any attention. The cabin-boys on ships cross themselves on leaving the harbour and then forget. Soldiers, when they hear the first bullets, know what will happen if they are hit: but habit influences them and frivolity

wins them back. Sailors, soldiers, civilians at the rear, we are all, sometime or other, condemned to die. The important thing is to realize it.

The truth is that religion flourishes whenever men pause and begin to think. Because this war is being carried on by people who are not professional soldiers, each one has been uprooted from his normal place and consequently from his routine. It has put each one in such a novel position that even those most limited mentally are anxious to understand what it is that is happening to them. They are forced to think of their destiny and, willingly or not, they turn to the God whom they learned to know and pray to at their mothers' knees.

Curious things happen every day. Once a comrade received a large parcel from a pious woman whom he knew only slightly. We helped him to cut the string and open the box. The arrival of the post is always the most important happening of the day and, invariably, everyone is there prying into one another's boxes. He—or, more strictly speaking, we—took out in turn: socks, soap, pencils, patriotic post cards, a candle, a pipe, a box of chocolates, cigarette paper,

packages of tobacco, large plaid handkerchiefs and woollen helmets. At the bottom was a big envelope bearing these words: "To a soldier of France." It contained this classical letter from the unknown benefactress:

"Dear soldier, please accept these souvenirs. Take care of yourself and be brave. We love you and are praying for you."

Pinned to the top of the letter was a medal of the Holy Virgin, one of those penny medals, rather ugly, but of large size and very vivid.

All these things had to be divided among the men. The next day, in the trench, my friend selected a group of soldiers and went toward them with extended hand. He had in it the pipe, one package of tobacco, a wonderful cake of soap, and the medal.

The eyes of the men brightened but they hesitated. Among them was an extraordinary character, a kind of gutter-snipe, who came from the neighbourhood of Lille. His face was that of a cut-throat with the blackest, most piercing eyes imaginable. Our Northern girls frequently have beautiful dark eyes, a souvenir of the time of the Spanish domination. The eyes of this boy

were, however, wicked and inquisitive. He had a low forehead, ugly lips, and a Christ-like beard. His most striking features were his cheeks, which were always swollen with a mouth full of tobacco. He loved to chew tobacco. Every time he met one of us he always asked:

"*Et ch'toubaque?*"

Which meant: "My Lieutenant, give me a little tobacco." It was the only way he could say it in his jargon. It was impossible to refuse him after looking at his eyes. Usually they were cunning, but he could make them so humble and funny!

"He will certainly snatch the *toubaque*," thought I.

I was not mistaken about the snatching. He snatched something before any of the others could have a chance, saying:

"*Mi, j'prinds l'medal.*" (Me, I take the medal!)

Quickly he dropped the Virgin into a filthy purse.

This happened quite near the beginning of the winter. I had not yet lived long enough with all these men to understand them well. I must own that my astonishment surpassed all limits.

To-day I know that they all have medals; some keep them in their pockets; some, around their neck; others, pinned to their shirt; a few, on their coat; many, on the front of their caps. They also have flags and enamelled badges of the Sacred Heart, with blue borders, white background and, in the middle, a red heart surmounted by a cross.

When I first came I was told that a certain corporal was an anarchist and to beware of a certain soldier who was an anti-militarist and a revolutionary. Both of these men, like their comrades, have these emblems pinned on their chests.

I know a sergeant, a great, big, warm-blooded fellow, from the regular army. He is always too hot, and, besides, his coat gets in his way. He is always roaming around the camp or in the trenches in his sweater. On that sweater I have counted eleven medals of all shapes and colours hanging to two or three safety pins.

Probably their wives, mothers, and sisters send them from the rear. But why do they wear them so readily? And why such ostentation when, in civil life, their greatest care was to hide the little Christianity they possessed?

At first I misjudged them. I remembered how the Norman peasants tie medals around the necks of their sick calves, hoping to cure them in that way. I thought: "They are superstitious and think all that tin is of great worth in God's eyes. They fear death, and to preserve themselves they cover their bodies with fetishes and amulets."

This may be true, to a certain extent, but it is not all the truth. There is a certain amount of real piety in all devotion to medals. Many of these emblems are revered in memory of the dear ones at home, who said when their men went away on that fateful second of August: "Take that and keep it on you always." It is the only reminder of home except for the greasy photographs always carried in their pockets.

That reminder is a religious image and they are quite willing to cherish Our Lady, or Saint Michael, or Joan of Arc, on account of the old mother or the wife who is crying at home and who writes such moving letters.

Do not let us abuse the rear. It is from there that those letters which restore our courage come. No later than this morning

a soldier showed me one he had just received. It was from his wife telling him, in words that he did not understand, of some trouble she was in, in regard to her allowance from the Government. I did not exactly understand her difficulty, but I saw that the poor woman was unhappy although trying to be resigned. She is going to have a baby and spoke of her sadness at not being able to have her "man" with her for the birth. She wrote: "Let us pray God to make the child I bear a good Christian." It is a beautiful sentence. I wondered while I read it whether the poor woman had not instinctively found the most perfect way of serving God. Her religion touched me as much as that of my medal-bearers.

There are two elements in the devotion we render God: the spirit and discipline. A perfect Christian not only thinks but acts his religion. When he thinks: it is spiritual. When he acts: he practises his religion and obeys its commandments. Most Christians are only men and, therefore, imperfect.

There are those who emphasize the spiritual, and whose thoughts are continually

dwelling at such lofty altitudes that they neglect altogether the practical aspects of religion. Such are the authors of neo-christianity and new thought. They pursue a nebulous God, in a nebulous sky, but would disdain to seek him by kneeling in a church.

But during the years just preceding the war there has been a real reaction toward practical Christianity with the emphasis laid on discipline. Many young sons of theorists or sceptics began to attend church services, say their prayers, and go to communion frequently. In their every-day life they were gay, merry, and fond of out-of-door sports. They enjoyed physical and moral health and were not bothered by hazy anxieties nor endless speculations. They were Christians and followed their religion; that was all.

This kind of religion is perfectly well adapted to the life we are leading at present. What would happen if we engaged in continual speculations regarding our military duties? As soldiers our task is to use our entire efforts in performing them. It is the same with our Christian duties; this is not the time for discussion but for prayer.

There are here two officers, far, far above me in rank, who evidently have this same idea. I occasionally find them at twilight walking in a solitary *boyau* telling their beads. They are very much embarrassed when they see me and must respond to my salute, and evidently regard me as an intruder. Yet sometimes I stop to talk because here, the least word exchanged brings joy and pleasure. When I leave, they resume their prayer although they do not know exactly where they left off, and then they forget their troubles, the war, and everything else, in proclaiming to the Virgin, with the stars to witness, that they bow to her and that her Son is blessed.

I have never attended an open-air mass, but it must be highly impressive. In the war area I have seen nothing but low mass, held in the little church, back near our rest camp. The participants are usually two or three small groups of soldiers, with perhaps an officer or two sitting in the front row and sometimes an old woman close to the pulpit. A soldier officiates as priest and, from beneath his surplice, protrude his uniform and huge military boots. At the end of the service each one receives

communion. Although not numerous, the prayers of these faithful people ought to protect the others. I am sure that God must regard with a kindly eye these camps from which, each morning, ascend a few devout prayers.

On the Sundays when we happen to be in the rear of the lines, resting—which occurs but rarely—the church is full. On Easter day we were in camp at M——,where the church has been damaged by shell fire. The big nave is pierced and the main altar open to the sky, while the choir is littered with plaster, broken pieces of iron, and bits from the fallen roof. The altar on the right is broken. The one on the left has not suffered, and toward it is turned the attention of the crowd in uniform which has gathered here to-day braving the draughts, coughing loud and praying little. However, they are an attentive audience, submissive to the articles of the creed, and obedient to the commandments of the church. Can one ask more of people whose heads have been crammed for so many years with the materialistic theories of the demagogues. We may blame those who lead and guide public opinion

but not those who follow. The latter have been misguided by their very virtues: willingness and simplicity of heart. When they pin medals on their shirts they perform a positive act beside which piles of books, written by denying philosophers, are only trash.

When a poor woman, on the verge of becoming a mother, thinks of praying God to make her child a good Christian it seems like a miracle, for it is a long time since anyone has spoken like that in France. She does not ask for a saint, but for an honest boy, and naturally the old words, used by her grandmother, come back to her lips. She says "good Christian" for "good son" and renders thus to God and to religion a homage compared with which the finest monument is of little value.

What is the explanation of this new birth of faith, this return to the words and practices of old? It is the fruit of all our past efforts and sufferings of the sacrifices made during the difficult years France has passed. I do not wish to criticize the leaders of the Church, but it is the more humble pastors who obtain their reward to-day; those who have "held on" as we

say at the front; those who, in spite of opposing wind and tide, have been good pilots, in the words of our brothers the sailors; those who have steadily opposed the arguments of the sophists and, in spite of all, maintained the simple traditions of the Church and the precepts of Christianity. They erected shrines at all the cross-roads, and the crowd passed by without respect. To-day, in the general devastation of war, the only thing left standing upright is the cross.

Come and see it with me. It is in the centre of an immense plain, bordered on the German side by a shallow valley. For a distance of four kilometres one can see nothing but land—once cultivated, but now desolate and wild. A thin curtain of foliage opposite hides a village held by the enemy. Far away to the right a row of young trees indicates a road. It is only the slimness of these trees which has saved them. All the others have been cut down and used to line the dugouts or cover the trench shelters. One never meets a living soul, for those who go to or return from the front pass by way of the *boyaux* which burrow in all directions through these fields.

Come! You need not hesitate; at this distance the bullets have spent their force. If the Germans see us through their field glasses and send a few shells our way, there will be time enough to throw ourselves in this *boyau*, which, although unnoticeable, runs along this road only four yards away. Now look; above that rise of the ground, which hid it until now, stands the thin silhouette of a cross. It is of iron and the Christ is dolorously bending his head. About its base are four stumps cut off almost level with the ground. They are all that remains of the beautiful trees which once sheltered this pastoral shrine. It stands alone amongst a labyrinth of *boyaux*. All around are shell-holes filled with muddy water after the rain.

From this place, at night, you can see the illuminating shells of the Germans ascending not only from one but from three sides. Our trenches, in this region, curve forward in a salient. It is as if the enemy had been obliged to draw a respectful half circle round the image of Christ.

Let us go nearer. Resting on the pierced feet is a bunch of withered flowers. How came they there, and when? Perhaps the

soldier whose piety urged him to leave this offering is now occupying one of the graves, marked with small white crosses of wood, which are lying all about; or, if he be alive, he may be over there digging in some *boyau*, or on guard duty in some trench, watching, that all France may sleep behind him. Whatever the case, some man has lifted his eyes toward this image and one day has even prayed there.

At the change of guard we pass beneath the extended arms of this Christ, on the way into the front line. I don't know whether many of us say a prayer to Him when we cross his gaunt shadow in the moonlight, but God will remember the one, be he ever so humble, who once put down his flowers and called on Him there. He has commanded that His image be not destroyed and that it remain here on our horizon. With head gently bowed and wide-open arms, He watches over the dead of the plain and blesses the living, devout or otherwise who—covered with dust, their backs bent under the weight of their knapsacks—go in long, silent columns to take their fighting post.

IX

Bravery

WHY is it that the French show so much bravery in war and so little in peace?

Everyone here is courageous. There has been great discussion as to which required the more courage—going forward to the assault, or holding on under heavy artillery fire. I don't hesitate to give my own answer: the moral courage exhibited by certain territorials in keeping cool under the most pitiless trench bombardment is even more admirable than the ardour of their younger comrades while running forward to a bayonet charge. This war has required from an entire nation in arms qualities which never before had been demanded even from regular armies.

Almost all regiments have adopted dogs found in some abandoned village. Our

company has two or three, one of which lives with the officers. He is a good-looking animal, supple, playful, and a marvellous rat hunter. He is amiable with men but very quarrelsome with his brother dogs and does not hesitate to attack even the biggest and strongest. This beast, enthusiastic in assault and a heroic fighter, would be a model of warlike virtues if he weren't afraid of the cannon. Poor dog! When a bomb bursts he puts down his ears, his tail goes between his legs, and he hides under our legs, pressing against us, trembling and timid. Nearly all dogs behave in this way.

It is the same with the black people, they love to fight with the knife and are not afraid of the most bloody struggle, but under the shells they often lose courage.

One must have intelligence and reasoning power to resist the fire of concealed artillery, whereas instinct is enough in open fighting. I do not despise instinct. Natural courage is a gift from God. It would be just as foolish to despise it as to disdain intelligence. It is an enviable quality, but unequally divided among men. Those who possess it have an indisputable advantage and they become leaders. But in measuring

relative courage in the mass of the French people what I esteem most is hardly acquired bravery. The strongest enemy is not opposite, in the German trenches, but inside each one of us. Man becomes noble when he conquers his own cowardice.

And it is not a matter of conquering it only once. Warriors of 1870 told me in my boyhood that one "dodged" the first bullets but that later one grew so accustomed to them that one stood straight up when they whistled by. It is not always true. I know some officers whose courage, on the contrary, has been worn out on the battlefield. It is necessary to make renewed efforts at each succeeding danger and I don't think that the baptism of fire ever has the power to harden the soul for all time. At present those who have braved hardships and danger through so many months have developed a great love of life. It seems all the more precious to them because they have escaped so many perils. At first they shut their eyes and offered themselves to destiny. Now those who have survived think they are chosen to participate in the wonderful joys of the triumphal return. Thinking of that

blessed and longed-for day reminds me of a sentence I have often heard, even from the humblest soldiers: "The last man to be killed is the one I pity."

One has repeated a thousand times that the cry in this war is "Hold on." It is not easy for each hour brings new temptations. On the days of activity the soul is elevated above all weakness by the intoxication of fighting, but each day of passive trench warfare only serves to renew one's misery.

Fearlessness before death is one virtue which I would not include among those which will remain when the war is finished. We are like people who have become accustomed to travelling on railways without apprehension of danger. Suddenly an accident occurs. Once frightened, they are doomed to travel for a long time with a feeling of nervousness. Ordinarily, one does not mind the first shells. That is the period of heedlessness of danger through which we nearly all pass. One day the noise gets too loud for one's nerves. One's teeth begin to chatter and there is no remedy. As the war goes on there are some whose physical uneasiness grows instead of diminishes. Each time that they overcome it their character grows

and they show themselves more courageous. But when peace comes they will have had enough and the smell of powder will give them no pleasure whatever.

Yet it will be no time to falter, for when the day comes and we have escaped the risks of death which assail us here, the great thing will be to remain brave through life. Shall we succeed? Is it possible that the word "bravery," under different conditions, can refer to two different kinds of virtue? It is curious that in time of war self-interest may produce courage, while in peace it causes only cowardice.

In a village, where I happened to be before the war, an old woman was being buried. She had deserved universal veneration. All the men, dressed in their Sunday black, came and awkwardly saluted the coffin. The procession started and everyone bowed as it passed. I could not but admire the tribute paid to this old woman by the entire community, rich and poor alike. They came to the church. The little square was full of sunlight. The priests in their surplices, the assistants in white, disappeared beneath the portico. The singing grew fainter and died away among the cool

arches. The coffin entered the holy place followed first by the school children and then by the women. When the turn of the men came, I was surprised to see them turn slightly to the left and gather a few yards away under a tree, while the doors of God's house were slowly closing.

Did these men know how dreadfully they slighted the dead woman? Did they realize that, because they were afraid of the anti-clerical element then in power, they were committing a displeasing, disloyal, and cowardly action?

This group of careful citizens did not seem noble to me that day. Their courage had left them because a delegate from the *sous-prefecture* might have seen them and if they had acquired a reputation as church-goers it would have been the end of hopes of advancement from the anti-clerical officials.

I remember that I regarded them as so many waifs to be pitied and that I despaired of ever elevating a people which was only actuated by self-interest.

Here at the war that same self-interest has proved a marvellous influence. One must distinguish voluntary heroism from

enforced heroism. The former is the better quality. It consists of choosing, of one's free will, the dangerous posts. Those who have voluntarily enlisted, although not compelled to serve, and those at the front who, in spite of relatively safe duty, are always seeking patrol duty in "no man's land," or equally perilous missions, are brave among the brave. But others who may have hoped to escape the mobilization, and who, in the dangerous hours, go to the second line and try to make themselves smaller in the hope of evading detection, also become brave when they cannot do otherwise. Let us not despise their courage for it is the only kind possessed by the innumerable people we call the crowd; when one speaks of "the brave French" one speaks of them. Despite the enthusiasm with which they are made, our troops have not requested the privilege of making those attacks which the world admires and our adversary dreads. It is because they have been ordered to go, that everyone tries to become a hero. The poor fellow who began in fear ends in a wild intoxication of valour. He did not willingly seek adventure but it is his because he

cannot escape it. Self-interest demands that he face the peril. Forward then! He feels his neighbour's elbow against his, and his comrades' eyes upon him. He dare not advance less valiantly than they; his pride goaded by his interest, he tries to arrive before the others and show himself the finest of all.

There are no more two kinds of bravery —one for war and one for peace—than there are two kinds of self-interest. The apparent difference is the fault of the leaders; it is they who play on the strings of the human heart in order to make it cowardly or valorous.

Leaders influence a man by appealing to his own interest, but not always toward a worthy end. In the war those who command have their minds fixed on the public good. They show the right way to all and thus create rivalry in performing duty. In peace time the contrary occurs although the public good should be equally important. Everyone then follows the fashionable lead. Here and there a few bold characters may defy it, but the crowd is piteously enslaved. I no longer blame the people now that I have seen how they will

follow to the assault, but I bear a bitter grudge against those who mislead and guide them downward, when they could as well guide them upward to almost any height. The war shows us that men are good or bad according to how they are directed, and that good government can make great people.

If after the victory we create a new condition of affairs and the forces of the nation are at last well organized and managed, the heroism shown here will have schooled us to display the same virtues in peace. Then let the *élite* cultivate bravery on the battlefield, not only bravery before death, but in the face of all risks and all responsibilities.

Life will severely try the courage of the boldest soldiers. When they come back covered with honour, ribbons, and medals, they must not at the first difficulty fall back into the old weakness.

There used to be one form of cowardice which in particular we must avoid. We created childless homes, in spite of the knowledge that everything commands us to have children; the Motherland as well as our instincts. Children are the chief source of joy and strength, but we thought

only of the trouble involved or the money required. We were afraid. The women also were afraid. They feared the suffering or the responsibilities. Men and women were equally weak in facing life. Instead of painfully putting aside a small fortune for an only son to squander they should have used the same effort in raising a family of many children and left them a heritage of real value: strong arms and brave hearts.

France depopulated herself on account of these brave men whom the whole world now admires and who will be covered with laurels on the blessed day of peace. To make them retain their more noble instincts, they must continue to strive in peace as they did upon the field of battle.

X

The Enemy

AT FIRST it was William!

The train which took me to Arras at the time of the mobilization ran through rich fields which were being harvested. Here and there a few old men and children, almost prostrate from the heat, were binding stacks of wheat while numbers of ruddy-faced women lined the fences enclosing the railroad and shouted: "William's ears!"

More than one mobilized man at that time thought that with a little luck, in some fight, he might come near enough to the Kaiser to amputate his ears and offer them to these ladies!

The English, when their trains were being cheered, never forgot to make two gestures: they seized a pair of imaginary mustachios with one hand and, with the edge of the

other, pretended to cut their throats. The German Emperor's throat was slashed in this manner throughout the time of the mobilization of the first British army.

It was necessary for the popular anger to have an object. The day before peace had been reigning. Not only did one not expect war but one did not even want to think it possible. It burst out suddenly. Whose fault was it?

Not that of the Germans, assuredly. We had forgotten there ever were such things as Germans. To be sure years ago one spoke of the Prussian menace, but that was an old story. The Germans could not be our foes. Our people were all too busy quarrelling at home to make enemies abroad. When the war broke out they felt more hatred against their neighbours than against a far-away and hypothetical people like the Germans. Let the militarists write long articles about the coming German invasion through Belgium and beg that the town of Lille be fortified: the cunning peasant was busy protecting his farmyard against the intrusion of his neighbour and cared little for anything else.

Our people recognized only one German: "William." Hence he must be the one to blame. Besides, the loosing of such a calamity could only be the work of a tyrant. The ignorance of the crowd served only to augment its prejudice. I joined in singing the Marseillaise on the second of August but with more ear for the tune than for the words. Nevertheless, a few words, a few phrases at the station brought tears to my eyes.

"Le jour de gloire est arrivé!
Aux armes citoyens!"

Other lines seemed to me less appropiate:

"Contre nous de la tyrannie
L'étendard sanglant est levé."

Many good people have been moved to tears while repeating these words until lately so long out of use. A despot being in the business, there was only Kaiser William and they thought that it was against him in person that the whole of France was rushing with a song.

Other people went further. They took pity on the Germans who were being misled

by a bad master and started a campaign to free them from his despotism. The newspapers hailed us as the champions of Liberty fighting to emancipate the German slaves, whereas it was really French liberty desperately trying to escape the German yoke. With pride they looked forward to the punishment of William and the establishment of a German Republic. If we establish a Republic over there—or several Republics, as I would prefer—it is not the Emperor whom I wish to see most punished but my enemy, his people. The Kaiser is only an object for ridicule.

One day a new word ran from mouth to mouth. Our troops had encountered the adversary, not in the guise of Cæsar, but in that of an innumerable horde. Whence came *THESE* men, and who were they? They were nicknamed "the Boches," and in our cries, in the long nightmares of feverish nights, "Boches" replaced "William." We at last knew our enemy.

Why that nickname for the Germans? Very few of my comrades knew it before the month of August. I first heard of its existence toward the end of 1913. I had been visiting at Saverne at the time of the deed of

the infamous Forstner. I realized how inevitable and near the war had become.

Passing through Nancy on my return, I was exchanging impressions with some young friends, when one of them said:

"As a matter of fact the 'Boches' are absolutely unbearable."

"The what?" said I

"The *Alboches* . . . ."

I am sure that all those who have tried to find an ingenious explanation for this new word in etymology have gone astray. The French word for "German" is "*Allemand.*" This was changed to "*Alboche*" by the men because it was a kind of play on the word and the syllable "Boche" expressed derision because it rhymed with such terms of contempt as: "*caboche*, *moche*, *bidoche*," and a crowd of others. Later the first syllable was dropped to make the word shorter and more adaptable to rapid speech in the same way that a name is contracted into a nickname; only the word *Boche* remained. That it hits the nail on the head is shown by the universal favour it has obtained.

What are the sentiments of our men toward this flesh-and-blood enemy they

have found suddenly opposed to them? They hate him; but I am uncertain whether it is because he is German or because he is on the other side of the line.

When two teams of players are opposed, there immediately arises a feeling of hostility. What begins as friendly rivalry may rapidly change to jealousy and terminate in enmity. This occurs among all classes of people and even in armies. An artilleryman makes fun of an infantryman, and the "poilu" who is stagnating in his trench calls the gunner "slacker" because he is concealed a little distance behind the front. In a regiment different companies may have quarrels. A captain one day sent a note to one of a neighbouring sector asking him to look after his men who were exceeding their boundaries in looking for firewood. He added that he would be "Unmerciful to soldiers from a *FOREIGN* company if found on our ground." It was necessary to ask him whether his note was intended for French trespassers or for those from the line opposite.

In fact, the greater part of our men, suddenly surprised by the war, are not yet prepared to recognize the German as

a blood enemy; they only hate him because he is their adversary, and that is not enough.

There is among us a good fellow with a kind and calm appearance. At the outset of the campaign his section was caught in a tight situation at a very short distance from a line of enemy sharpshooters. He threw himself into a huge shell-hole from where he could, without great danger, shoot at the devils in helmets as they advanced. The rest of the section—condemned to an inglorious inactivity until the order came to show themselves on the ridge—sought shelter in a ditch a few yards to the right from which they could watch their comrade. He was shooting as if on the target range—loading, aiming, and firing with exactly the same precision. He said afterward that he had made wonderful scores. But the remarkable thing was the expression of greed and pleasure he showed each time a man fell. His mouth opened in a smile from ear to ear and his eyes sparkled. He looked like a little boy sitting down before a mountain of cakes. That man, who in civilian life perhaps never even wanted to see death, was actually laughing while killing Germans.

One evening in camp I made the acquaintance of a little sergeant who had just returned to the front after being wounded on the Meuse in the great retreat.

"May we not smoke one last cigarette together?" he said, holding out a cigarette.

It was a joke. He had thought so often during the first weeks that his last day had come, that now, whenever he smoked, his comrades repeated gaily:

"Maybe it is the last!"

His thin face surmounted by blue clouds of smoke, the young brigand told me horrible stories of the war. I remember chiefly the story of a great big Saxon officer who had suddenly appeared, revolver in hand, ten yards away from a French column. "He was sheltering his fat body behind a big tree," related his executioner; "he protruded a grimacing face and aimed at us. I was in front. I brought my gun to my shoulder and fired. He fell with a horrible cry. Then, mad with joy, I ran to him and turned him over to see the wound my bullet had made. I assure you it was a large one, it had done its work well."

I looked at him, his eyes were turned toward the sky and he seemed to be experiencing an almost supernatural joy.

"Do you work for a butcher in civilian life, my friend?"

He answered that he was a student of theology. Since that story, and that of the vicar adjudant, I never feel assured when I ask people their profession.

There is not a soldier at the front who could not recount twenty similar anecdotes. They prove only that we are fighting mercilessly an enemy who has been pointed out to us.

"My Lieutenant, could you loan me ten francs on a Boche?"

The general commanding that army who needed prisoners from whom to obtain information had announced that any soldier who brought back a German to our lines would receive a premium of fifty francs. A man with a reputation for drunkenness decided to go and win the reward in order to buy himself wine. He kept his word, but before starting he was anxious to get a little money in advance to brace his nerves. He was very funny as he stood with his hand extended and a

cunning air. We decided, some friends and I, to refuse him what he asked. A few days later a patrol was ordered, and he asked to take part in it. He brought back a remarkable Boche as prisoner, a huge fair fellow, apparently well educated, and who told us that he had been a clerk in an important Dresden bank. He showed us pictures of his wife and three children; a good-looking family. We examined with curiosity this specimen of the innumerable Germans living in the ground across from our lines, who are at the same time so near and yet so distant! Such a deep chasm separates us from these people who, within sound of our voices, are defiling and trampling our soil. Behind his blue eyes there was concealed a violent emotion. To get him alive it had been necessary to kill two or three of his comrades. The only reason why the young woman whose portrait he had shown us was not a widow at that moment was because with fifty francs a man can buy wine enough to last a good many days.

"Hello! Tell us how you took him."

"I put my hand on him and held on tight. He did not want to come, the miserable specimen, but I got angry!"



He stopped and I thought he was again going to throw himself on the prisoner.

"Steady," said the commandant. "Continue."

"I made him run in front of me and kicked him whenever he wanted to stop. You needn't be afraid, my Commandant, he has had all that he wants——"

There followed a queer exchange of looks between the big dreamy-eyed German and the little French gutter-snipe.

"All the same," the Frenchman added, "fifty francs is not very generous for a man of that weight."

And yet that man, in spite of his violent words, is not a determined enemy of Germany. Drunkard though he be, he makes a satisfactory soldier and will fight, not only anywhere, but against anybody.

There are times when one can look at the enemy without hatred. I have seen a crowd of soldiers go and visit a still-seeking battlefield in the same way that other people go to a fair. On the second of May one of our lines had to bear the brunt of an intense bombardment, followed by the assault of a strong reconnoitring party. The



resistance of our comrades was strong and successful. A German officer fell in the trench itself and thirty-five dead bodies remained just outside the parapet. The affair had begun in the afternoon of Saturday. The next day the weather was beautiful, and from all the neighbouring sectors soldiers and officers came in Indian file to see the dead.

It is perhaps the only time that a Sunday has seemed really a holiday. Sundays, at the front, are days just like the others, only much sadder for that very reason. This one stood alone; it seemed as if everyone was idling around, waiting for some band to play. Yet at the same time the dead officer, a Lieutenant of the Guards decorated with the iron cross, was lying neglected in a narrow passage—his uniform, where it had not been torn by the barbed wire, stained with mud and blood. We stepped over the body and went our way. Our conversation showed no trace of emotion. We are here at the war to kill the Boches; so we kill them and that is the end of it.

However, if I ask the sergeant-major, he will tell me that he felt very sad the day that young officer from the Grand Duchy of Baden was killed just in front of him.

The latter was scarcely more than a child and had shown courage and gallantry in action. There was infinite pathos in watching his death struggle on the plain.

Now let us question that tall sergeant who is standing on tiptoe to see better from his trench.

"What are you looking at?"

"There is a Boche parading over there. I have a good mind to kill him."

"Well, don't hesitate."

This man is a very good shot. He aims. We all watch. The silhouette totters and disappears. I leave the place shivering.

When will these warriors, so courageous and ardent in the fight, find out why they are here? How long will it be until they learn that their mission is to teach a race that it cannot prey on others?

I see two ways of considering the Germans.

They have qualities which we lack: we must study them in order to acquire their virtues. They have faults which we hate: we must make these public in order to indicate the actual source of our enmity.

Of their good qualities our soldiers have recognized the principal one; the only one that matters.

The Germans are organized. The whole of their big country is a beehive where everyone, in his designated place, works for the good of the Fatherland. The affairs of the individual are secondary to those of the State. However, if the State is well governed and vigilant, all interests profit in their turn, and the individual fortunes benefit from those of the nation.

Our soldiers do not comprehend all that clearly: they have scarcely known the Germans long enough to think about them. They do know, however, that they encountered a machine, so powerful and so perfectly organized that at first they were dazed. It is difficult to understand how the moral courage of the French was able to withstand the shock when they first encountered German method and German foresight. Do not let us be stingy in our praise; I will make retractions enough presently. Germany, at the time of her march on Paris, won for herself the unwilling admiration of the world. Her immortal failure on the Marne and the hatred which she has aroused since have not yet effaced the remembrance of those first days. Is power of organization a German quality

or is it the result of their system of government? The Germans, although laborious and precise in their ways, are naturally inclined toward intellectual disorder. While France—queen of nations when she is properly governed—was abandoning herself to revolutionary dreams imported from the other side of the Rhine, Germany was benefiting from a monarchy frankly modelled after ours. Anarchy is German. Order is French. Temporary fashions have inverted the rôles but other fashions will restore them when we learn their relative importance.

Our sky is at last beginning to clear. The mass of the people still remains ignorant and there are yet many dishonest leaders. A great lesson was necessary to instruct the former and unmask the latter. Our enemies have brought it to us.

Have you travelled? Have you ever entered a big European or American port without a tightening of the heart? Our merchant marine has been blotted out and French people have lost all interest in it. One doesn't bother about ships when one stays at home, but when a patriotic Frenchman finds himself some day in one of those

immense harbours where the shipping of the world comes and goes, and when he sees fluttering in the wind the flags of all nations save his own, he begins to think. He comes home resolved to make this shame public, to beg people to look about them and come out of their torpor. He has to fight against easy talkers who reason without seeing and deny the facts when they interfere with their beliefs. There is one sure way to convert them: put them all aboard big ships and make them travel about the world. The spectacle of how other nations are flourishing probably would make them blush and cure them of their folly.

The Germans, uninvited, have rendered us this service. It is hard to see them on our soil, but at least we have had the opportunity to study them more closely. We have been watching an armed nation organized for invasion and for murder.

There is not a man in our trenches today who does not deplore the slackness of French institutions compared with the powerful organization of such a neighbour and who does not realize the necessity of a step back toward order and toward

strength. This is what the sight of the enemy has taught us; and it is much.

We have opposite us a regiment of the Prussian Guard and are greatly honoured. Although picked soldiers, not all of them speak the French language. There are some among us who know German. When the exchange of words between trenches begins in the latter tongue, one is more quickly and better understood. The great number of us, however, derive most joy from conversations in French. It is necessary to understand each other in order to exchange tobacco and newspapers. But who will go out of the lines? The Boches invite a Frenchman to make the first step.

"Come on! *Nous ne dirrerons bas.*" (*Nous ne tirrerons pas*—We will not fire!)

They roll the "r" and accentuate the "i" in pronouncing these words. They lay emphasis on the "*pas*" ("not") in a disdainful manner.

"No! *You* come, we have some cigars."

The affair is rarely settled because, on the German side or on ours, an officer passes and orders silence.

One day I asked a bold fellow, whom I had caught flirting in this manner with a

distant Prussian, why he hesitated to go out on the plain between the lines and chat a little with his opponent. Another soldier had tried it only a few days earlier. The two men, the Frenchman and the German, had gone out at noon under the watchful glances of about a hundred of their comrades from both camps. Many fingers, no doubt, rested on the rifle triggers, ready to shoot if either one made a menacing gesture. They had spoken of the war and of the suffering of the soldiers; then they had lighted cigars and returned.

"I don't trust them."

"And why?"

"They have too much method those people——"

He explained to me that the Boches would be quite capable of throwing themselves suddenly on the ground to let their friends shoot. One way the Germans have of employing their machine guns has greatly impressed our men. At first we used to attack without much prudence. The Germans would retreat and seem to be fleeing before our bayonets. We would follow them until they had led us into a trap, whereupon they would suddenly unmask

some machine guns and begin firing mercilessly. Many boys fell in this way. The very few who escaped felt anger mingled with admiration.

"They have thought of everything, the scoundrels!"

I say "scoundrel" because I want to be polite. What they really say would scarcely bear repeating. Our poor soldiers, so brave, so frequently dismayed at the way the Germans were allowed to organize themselves, often express that sentiment.

"Look, my Lieutenant, that balloon over there is Boche. It is only they who can imagine such things."

It was at the outset of the war when, for the first time, we saw one of their sausage balloons. From a distance it was difficult to determine whether it was above our lines or theirs.

"It is Boche! It is surely Boche! Indeed they have thought of everything. And then it is so ugly: it must be theirs."

Ugly or not there is some good in the "sausage" and now we have them, too. But the soldiers would have liked it better if we had not had to learn that lesson, along with many others, from the Germans.

Please note, however, that we surpass them when we imitate them. They had illuminating rockets; ours now are better than theirs. But early in the war they were the only ones who could send up fireworks in the night, much to the humiliation of our own soldiers.

One of my comrades was wounded in August, 1914, during the German march on Paris. He received five bullets in his arms, shoulder, and legs. The Germans captured the ground on which he lay and he was first cared for in a German ambulance. Then came the retreat after the Marne. The invaders, in running away, left the French wounded behind them. My friend, after getting well, has consequently come back to occupy his place among us. But he has seen the famous Von Klück army close at hand and here are his two chief impressions.

As he lay on the ground, he saw a line of enemy sharpshooters coming toward him. They were walking elbow to elbow, rifle in hand. Would they respect a fallen officer? His feet were toward them so that he could see the entire manœuvre. As the line approached it divided, the ranks

opening to right and left, and passed by his body without touching it. If they had seen him they avoided him as they would a bundle of dirty straw. Their eyes were fixed, full of anxiety, and seemed lost in the distance. Their hands trembled. Terror was depicted on their pallid faces and they were not attempting to conceal it. These victorious warriors were wild with fright. Our poor troops had been taken in an ambuscade and were obliged to withdraw while the enemy pursued with chattering teeth and each man pressing against the next for comfort. There are many courageous people among the Germans; we have not got a monopoly on bravery, but as a whole they are not courageous. One of the wonders of German organization is that it can have disciplined such people, even unto death.

However, the infantry was still advancing and, after it, came the artillery. A battery of 77-millime re guns unlimbered a few yards away from the wounded man. German officers came up and surrounded him. He was questioned with quite a little courtesy, while a lieutenant brought some straw to protect him from the sun. The

guns opened fire on his comrades who were retreating in the distance. What painful moments were those to my friend! His undressed wounds pained him much less than the proximity of those energetic men intent on killing French people. One of them seized just that moment to come and talk to him.

"France is lost, that is certain! We are going to take Paris, my friend. I know Paris as well as you. I have worked there, my comrades also, for a long time. We have prepared everything so that we will be well received. You had not foreseen anything; so much the worse for France! You wear red trousers: a stupid fault which the Germans would never have committed. Nothing can resist an organization like ours and I pity you to be fighting against such a formidable civilization!"

He continued like that for a long time until my friend finally fainted away partly from suffering, partly from loss of blood. However the words of this German were full of truth.

Yes, their organization nearly proved too much for us and it has been a good lesson.

Yes, their civilization is formidable, not

only for the French but for the whole of humanity.

The fault of this man, one common to all his race, lies in not distinguishing the difference between the two words he has uttered. He knows that one of the elements of civilization is order, consequently organization. And as the only civilized quality he possesses is that of application to methodical work, he proclaims that virtue sufficient for all. It is termed in French "taking a part for the whole"; and in all languages "making a mistake."

A good man, in France, in the Seventeenth Century was one who possessed a fine general culture and polished manners, who led a straight life, and was agreeable to meet. He was a civilized man in the fullest sense of the word and utilized these qualities of heart and mind in increasing his own happiness and that of others.

A man of that type is perfectly "organized." But our neighbours thought it would be better to replace this internal harmony of the individual, which is the source of all civilization, with a happier social organization. They therefore created wonderful systems of law: but the only

people who could obey them were the Germans.

The inhabitants of old Germany lack the French qualities of clear intelligence, wit, and good taste which, without effort, refine and elevate men above their fellows. They have other virtues but they do not compensate for the precious ones they lack. They realize this and are envious, like poor relations.

Believing themselves to be despised by others, they have cultivated love of self to the extreme. They began to worship their own methods and to proclaim them supreme. Their great qualities of industry and obedience made them strong and they deified that strength. To-day they think they are the right arm of God.

In order to correct them we must know them. Let us examine them at war since it is in that line that they are now operating. They have wonderful tools—that we acknowledge; but what kind of intelligence is there behind this imposing machinery?

Let us take Rheims as an example. It has been said that if the rôles were reversed and we were besieging Köhn we would destroy their cathedral there, just as they

have ours at Rheims. I am sure of the contrary. German reasoning is well known: all damage caused to the French contributes to the final success; the more cruel the damage the better it serves their purpose. This method of calculating is apparently right. It contains the logic of war; the harder you strike, the earlier you will have peace. No German therefore can hesitate in front of Rheims. He sees at once that the cathedral is a jewel and moreover a sacred place, the temple of the holiest of French traditions. The enemy can be injured both morally and materially by knocking down those stones. The supreme aim of the war can thus be pursued. It is an excellent theory and he sets about placing his guns.

If the French were before Köhn they would reason also, but in a different manner: It is good to demoralize the enemy, but it is possible to exceed the mark and, by certain vexations, so to irritate him that his morale is raised instead of lowered. It is a simple problem but a German is incapable of solving it. We will not destroy Köhn, even as a reprisal. We will preserve on the battlefield the faculty of seeing beyond the war. The executioners

of Rheims should be punished in Köhn, but it is not necessary that the whole of mankind be made to suffer for the fault of only one people. Let us respect that which is the universal patrimony of the world but when the hour of settlement arrives, let us wrench the town and its temple away from the Germans as a ransom for the walls where our kings were crowned and which they have destroyed!

We have been given knives, great brigand's knives. Many among us who were familiar with the use of the rifle, revolver, bayonet, or sword were at first surprised to find these new weapons in their hands. They were the weapons of murderers and it was necessary to get accustomed to them. They are useful for fighting in the *boyaux*, and for that barbarous operation known as "cleaning the trench." Oh it is not pretty! We are soldiers, but we have never been butchers. Yet the only thing to do is to accustom ourselves to it: it is the German law!

They claimed that in war might creates right. It is our enemies who with a blind stupidity have violated one by one all the rules established by the *loyalty* of many

generations to their ideals. When a unit of troops, rapidly advancing, has taken a first line of trenches and has to go on to the next, there is not time enough to disarm and render powerless the prisoners they are going to leave behind. In the olden days the rules of war would have forced these defeated people to remain harmless. But today one knows that, obedient to the laws of German civilization, they will be treacherous. It is therefore necessary to slaughter them.

In the French army there are probably soldiers who will pillage if given the chance. If we advance into Germany, acts of vandalism may be committed, here and there, by our men. They will have a certain excuse as being reprisals, but what matter? A crime is never excusable. In that case France will, like any other nation, deserve criticism for not being able to stop certain excesses. The Germans are the only people who consider themselves above reproach in that respect. Excesses, when it is their army which commits them, change their name and become simply methods of warfare. Doctors, learned in German "Kultur," have already woven wreaths for those who have committed them.

Our soldiers from their dugouts see all this, but how much of it do they understand? Nothing very positively. An instinct moves them to hate these people who, they feel, are brutal, coarse, and different from themselves: a precious instinct but that is not enough.

The war over, writers and speech makers will begin to praise the Germans for their efficiency and power of organization and will tell us that after all the Boches were only defending themselves and that we cannot expect people to fight with flowers. With clever leaders I can imagine a campaign of German rehabilitation rallying some partisans in France within a few years. We must prevent that.

The crowd always sees facts but never discerns their causes. It must be the unceasing duty of the more enlightened to point out the chief cause behind everything that happens. We must systematically work to learn thoroughly the German soul, so that we may interpret the acts of the German people. Honoured be those who, since the war, in books or in newspapers, have made their contribution to this new fund of knowledge. But, in the meantime,

aided only by our judgment, we can discriminate between that which is an unavoidable act of war and that which constitutes a German crime.

In the barracks we used to give moral talks for the benefit of the men, which were nothing but useless words then. We have more useful lessons to spread abroad to-day. Let us teach our soldiers to know the enemy who lies buried in the ground opposite our lines. Let them admire his industry, discipline, foresight, and love of order; they are confronted with the greatest demonstration of these qualities ever before made. If they feel hatred let us give them the real reasons for their anger. Let us arm them against the stupid argument: "They are men like us." The German people are not like us. There is in their psychic processes a fault which, to French people, will always make them odious enemies in war and insupportable neighbours in peace: they are not intelligent.

XI

Intelligence

OUR men are intelligent. It is wrong to call them "poilus." That coarse name does not suit them and they do not like it. It evokes images of hirsute and savage faces. The French soldier, even when bewhiskered, remains an alert fellow, with a bright eye and a saucy repartee. Only once have I met a captain who spoke of his men as "poilus" and he was not a real soldier. It is literature which has made that name fashionable. Here another is in vogue. We say "Our types" or "What a type!"

Among one another they often speak of themselves as *bonhommes*. But that is a name for peace time. At the front the rather thick crust of the *bonhomme* falls at the first encounter and the *type* emerges.

By the word "type" one means: a queer

fellow, a remarkable specimen, or an original character. All of our soldiers have determined faces. They are full of character and always interesting. There is one trait common to all: intelligence. But what varied forms of it they possess!

Sometimes I am angered by what seems to be imbecile reasoning on their part but in that case it is not the brain which is at fault but the spirit which is weak. Some talk nonsense because truth is compromising or troublesome. With others, pride is responsible; they wish to appear well informed and begin talking of things of which they are ignorant. Wit and good sense are our great national riches. They should be utilized toward the best end.

At the outset of the winter our company was designated for a dress parade in a neighbouring camp. We were delighted. Only a week before we had caught a brief glimpse of that very event in passing through a village on our way home from a march. The troops were drawn up in a hollow square with the flag in the centre. Facing the flag was a group of officers and, a few yards away, the hero of the occasion—a tall captain, dressed in a fine blue uniform,

his head proudly erect. He was waiting to receive the war cross and the accolade from his chief. The guns were booming all around, but above their din could be heard the shrill fanfare of the trumpets opening the ceremony. We had to turn off at the first cross-road and so lost the pleasure of seeing the remainder of the spectacle. As we marched away we all listened, trying to make out, above the noise of our steps on the road, the dying notes of the brass instruments which were joyously publishing the glory of a soldier. In our ranks there was not a sound, only now and then the quick jump one takes to get back into step. We sought consolation in marching to the rhythm of the far-away music.

So to-day there is to be dress parade again and at last it is our turn to enjoy the beautiful spectacle. We march off cheerfully only to learn on the village square where our men have stopped with a happy stamping of heels, that we are to be the sad witnesses of a military degradation.

It is quickly over for it is a depressing business. There are a few brief orders, the companies line up around the square, facing inward. A deathly silence reigns. It is cold.

"Present arms!"

The men hold their faces rigidly forward but their eyes shift curiously toward the little street from which the condemned man is going to emerge. He appears, surrounded by six guards with fixed bayonets. He has a low forehead, a flat nose, and a brutal chin—a chin such as I have never seen before—long, flat, shaped like a spatula. Long legs, narrow shoulders, his arms drooping as if from the weight of his enormous hands, he looks around like a caged animal. The clerk of the military court reads in a loud voice, with much rolling of the r's an interminable indictment in which the name, christian name, age, domicile, and profession of the wretched man recur frequently. We learn the names of his father and mother, and that he has three children. He has deserted the front to go and drink and make merry at the rear, while his comrades were fighting, suffering, and dying. He is therefore condemned to ten years of prison: he well deserves it.

An officer approaches and says in a low voice:

"Who is the senior first sergeant?"

"It is I."

"Come quickly."

The non-commissioned officer thus called steps out of the ranks. He runs forward and plants himself in the middle of the square, his sword shining in the sunlight. I look at him while the dull reading continues. His features have altered. His face, which first was red, is now pale and determined. His lips are grimly closed. It is his mission to carry out the sentence of degradation and it is evident that he is deeply moved. Others might have a feeling of disgust, but this reservist, whom we have learned to love for his heart of gold, takes his duty more seriously. He understands that, for an instant, he is going to incarnate France herself and that it is only as her instrument that he is to punish one of her unworthy sons. His comrades who witness the act will find in it a lesson. He must strangle all sensibility and perform the sacred rite nobly and firmly.

The commandant turns toward the condemned man and cries in a loud voice:

"You are not worthy of remaining a soldier. We degrade you."

Then quickly, nervously, the little ser-

geant approaches the wretched man and begins to tear off his buttons and insignia. They come off with difficulty because, for lack of time, it has not been possible to loosen them beforehand as is usual. It is war! The man sneers because in order to make the task more difficult he has attached two of the buttons with wire. But the material finally gives and the sergeant, having finished, steps back into the ranks. Then with measured steps, surrounded by his guards, the degraded soldier is paraded before our ranks. In the emotion of the moment the sergeant has forgotten to remove his cap. One of the soldiers in his escort suddenly noticing it, knocks it off with a brusque gesture. The lamentable procession has soon covered the ground. In front of a wagon two *gendarmes* receive the man whom the army thus casts out.

Just then a ray of sunshine breaks through the clouds and falls on our faces like a caress. We march off, our souls heavy with thought. Suddenly a joyous bugle call resounds. The notes—alert, gay, and wild—make our hearts leap with their dizzying echoes. We feel a common pride in the fact that we are good soldiers. We

have rejected a wretch unworthy of us. We have seen how one must pay for being a traitor to one's duty. But just the same life is beautiful. France is glorious, and now we go proudly to our destiny, with our heads erect and our lungs drinking in deep breaths of the pure air.

A quarter of an hour later we had settled down to our tireless "route step." I was at the head of my company and so completely lost in thought that very soon I found myself among the rear men of the preceding company.

"Good morning, Lieutenant."

"Good morning. What company is this?"

"The iron company, sir Captain N——. All brave men."

"Then you are getting on all right?"

"We are getting on the best we can, sir. We laugh but we are quite unhappy just the same."

"Of course; so is everybody."

"We are like that poor chap."

"Whom?"

"The one who went away with the *gendarmes*. Ah! He is only a luckless fellow, not different from us."

I thought I was dreaming.

I had just profited from a great lesson and I supposed that all these men had taken it to heart the same as I. It had been such a clear lesson: crime punished and despised in the guise of torn clothing and disgrace. Duty and discipline honoured amidst the glorious tumult of the trumpets and rows of gleaming bayonets reflecting the rays of a friendly sun. I had marked off two kinds of men: on one side, that wretch, and on the other, the brave men who performed their duty—ourselves.

My soldier also saw two classes, but they were the strong and the wretched.

I studied him. He was handsome and strong, with straightforward eyes. I questioned him to see what he was really worth.

"And from home, is there good news?"

"My home?"

"Yes, your wife, your children?"

"They struggle on."

"How many children have you?"

"Three."

"You are like that man then."

"Oh! it isn't the same thing!"

"Beg pardon! You said you were all luckless fellows."

"Yes, but we don't make them throw us

into prison. One grumbles but one does one's work. You mustn't make that mistake."

"It is true he didn't look very honest, the *bonhomme*."

"Honest! He was disgusting. People like that ought to be shot."

"And don't people like you deserve to be punished?"

"Why, sir?"

"To teach you how to talk. What were you bragging about just now? You were a 'luckless fellow' just like the other."

"Oh, that was talk. When one talks it is well to appear wise. But all the same one understands things and one is different from the slackers."

You may say that that man was only stupid. I regard the crowd to which he belongs as imbecilic. In France you will find most men intelligent, but submerged by the collective stupidity. When a man speaks he wishes to appear wise! Under an orderly government, popular wisdom would urge people to cultivate virtues. To-day people think it clever to side with criminals. They are still at the period of Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables." They have been told that they ought to pity and excuse the

outlaws—they do it, although, privately, each one knows the difference between right and wrong. Assembled in herds the poor "types" follow the bad shepherds. Intelligence is not what they lack, but character.

"They don't realize a bit what is going on!" a disillusioned comrade said to me one day. "All the lessons of the war will be lost."

They understand perfectly. Look at them. At the beginning of the campaign they showed a wonderful adaptability of spirit in the open fighting. As clever at unmasking and hunting out the Boches as at dressing a chicken, they comprehended equally well the necessities and the resources of their soldier's craft. They utilized the ground just as if they had spent their youth in manœuvring on it. They patrolled methodically, searching the villages and the houses without a mistake or an imprudence. They divined and completed the thoughts of their officers. The only trouble with these lads is that they may wander and become scattered and thus be led into a blunder. But here each one considers the war as his own business.

It is necessary to be sharp oneself to retain the leadership in their midst.

At the outset of the trench warfare there were no *boyaux* behind the lines, and in order to communicate with the rear, it was necessary to wait for evening and go back over the exposed fields. During the blackest nights, without a star to guide them, the "types" would find their way to their destination, almost all of them, by a direct route. Instinct did not guide them. Whoever trusts to it ends by wandering around and around in the beet fields, and after having "kept the cows" for several hours, arrives back at the place whence he started. No, they walked according to guides which have remained a mystery to me but which their intelligence had recognized and adopted. The fact remains that they arrived.

In front of the trench they have pierced all the mysteries of the plain. They know where all the little posts are situated which one cannot see, the machine gun emplacements which reveal no turrets. To-day our trenches have been ravaged by torpedoes. Question any man and he will point to you the place from which they were sent and he will give you his reasons for thinking

so. They know where the German batteries are hidden. When the shells whistle over our heads, these men can determine, not only their direction and the gun which has fired them but also the objective and, according to the noise they make, the calibre of the projectiles. No, those men are not stupid.

However, their intelligence is misdirected; is has never been guided. They would understand everything if only their knowledge matched their comprehension. That they do not know more is due to the unworthy teachers who had enslaved them. The great vivacity of their spirits has helped to create this pitiful state of things. Their brains have been filled with socialistic theories at a time when they should have been nourished with the knowledge of sound moral principles. They have been so confused by sophistry that they no longer even recognize truth. The inevitable result has been that distrusting all movements relating to the public welfare, they withdrew into themselves and concentrated only upon the cultivation of their own selfish interests. Ignorance, slothfulness, and malignity ruled the land. Now this great

people has been disillusioned. Of what value was it to them to have been born intelligent, to have been given that strength of spirit which can and ought to master everything, when unexpectedly called without any preparation to face great organized armies—provided with terrible weapons? If there had not been so rude an awakening many of our men would have found themselves humble and helpless face to face with the tremendous German machinery. Thus, in life, the boor who lacks everything but the qualities of industry and obstinacy may gain the advantage over a man of stronger mind and impose upon him his will. A fool who works can intimidate an intelligent man who does nothing. Laziness and ignorance create stupidity, and even fine reasoning is of little avail against the blow of a club.

We are dealing with an overrated people. The German is a good scholar. In competition with you French soldiers, he gets the first prize, but it is only because of your faults. Cease to play carelessly with your intelligence; utilize it instead of wasting it in conversation, and very soon you will be receiving the respect, praise, and admiration



of the entire world. While certain people are still bowing before the Krupp factories, and thus debasing themselves, you can restore to France her glorious place of Queen of Nations, vacant since she relinquished it. You alone have power to bring back harmony in that European concert, which to-day is so horribly discordant. An apparently clever musical director resided in Germany. He has shown his poor talent; let us take up the conductor's baton.

When shall we realize that through our own folly we are wasting faculties which no other people possess? We must restore intellectual order in France. Our "types" are longing for truth, wisdom, and light. We will lead them in the paths of righteousness which they have forgotten.

In our country there exist brains of sufficient intelligence to find, amidst the universal confusion, paths which will be solid for the human feet. By them, if there but be true chiefs to point the way, the eager crowd can attain its full expansion and development.



XII

Letters

NEVER have the French men and women written as many letters as now. In peace time, when our men were dragging through their slow years of military service sometimes two, sometimes three, as the case might be—they wrote to their parents but rarely, and then without enthusiasm. Their letters, written in big characters, consisted of two or three classic sentences:

> Dear Parents: I take my pen in hand to tell you that I am in good health and I hope this letter will find you the same. Will you be kind enough to send me three francs or even five? I cannot find more to say at present. I embrace you from this distance. As always, your son.

In the letters from men of the lower classes one continually finds certain sen-

tences which enjoy a great popularity. A soldier, writing in 1913 to the Minister of War, ended with these words: "Finding no more to say, I shake hands with you." They fail for want of vocabulary. As they are not accustomed to writing they become frightened when confronted by a sheet of white paper. To the people one meets, one says mechanically: "How are you? Very well, thank you." One says that even if one is quite ill. There is no link at all between that which people ought to say when they meet and the words which issue mechanically from their lips. Do not judge that which an uneducated man would like to write by the words which he puts on his paper. His ideas having fled he grasps at ready-made sentences. But why always the same stereotyped phrases? All the people of France, for many years at least, have "taken the pen" have "hoped that this letter would find their dear parents the same"; and finally have found no more to say and frankly admitted it.

From father to son they have copied each other thus. Almost everyone copies someone when writing. One of our men—a good old chap whom, on account of age,

we had placed in the officers' kitchen for the sake of safety—left us recently. Under the pretext of having only men of the same age in a regiment, he was changed to a territorial regiment. Once there he lost his title as oldest man and became one of the crowd. His first letter filled us with regret. He wrote to an orderly:

My dear Paul, I have the honour to inform you that I am busy digging in the *boyaux*. It is sad when one has been in the kitchens. There is nothing more to say to you for the moment. My compliments to the officers. Ever your friend.

Poor fellow! Every day he had seen military notes beginning with the obligatory phrase: "I have the honour to inform you." He thought that it was very good, very dignified. He took pains in writing his letter and wanted to say whatever was correct.

But if you write to these people and give them good models, they can also write pretty letters.

The war has furnished the occasions. The godmothers are benevolent correspondents. Our men love these generous and kind-hearted women who always take the trouble

to enclose well-written notes in the many packages they send them. The men decipher, very seriously, the letters from their unknown benefactresses. All the words they find there are weighed, differentiated, and made much of. The sentiments of that far-away woman, or of that young girl whose writing is so refined, fall like a caress upon the good man; the affectionate expressions shake his uncultured soul; he is moved, astonished. Is that the way one ought to write? Well, if it be possible to let one's heart do the speaking and to put on the paper what one feels, it will be possible to answer the lady. Everyone tries his best and all the old awkward phrases are discarded for new ones which are used proudly, according to the example of the good *marraine*,

Those unsophisticated writers are clumsy only because they are inexperienced. When you write to them, Dear Women, remember that you are teaching them a new art. They had never corresponded before—outside of business—with those whose education is finer. Now when they write, they talk, they express human sentiments. Their hearts open toward one another in a broth-

erly manner, and an entirely unknown vocabulary comes rushing to their lips and permits their soul to blossom.

When you write to our soldiers, fill your letters with this divine music. Have in mind that they will try to learn its notes faithfully, in order to charm their wives or fiancées and the old mother who will weep at hearing her boy speak to her so softly. Do not send sermons or long speeches; write simply. They will wonder at the fact that the heart of a great lady so nearly resembles that of a poor man, but they will also learn that the poor man can, in his turn, send his respects to the beautiful lady and his love to his betrothed in sentences almost alike.

The other day in the firing trench I met a corporal whose talk usually amuses me. I was about to ask him to relate some of his stories when he gravely handed me a paper.

"I received this letter from my old woman. Read it, sir." I noticed that his eyes were red. He added in a low voice, trying to conceal a sob.

"They have killed my two brothers."

"Killed your brothers! Who?"

"The Boches! Read."

I unfolded the paper. It was already greasy and half torn at the folds from having been passed around, for the last two hours, among the members of the squad. Here is what I read:

My Dear Child:

I am very unhappy. Both your brothers, Georges and Auguste, have been executed. The Germans took them from the station to the Saint-Louis church with their hands tied behind their backs. My poor children knew that their last hour had come. They were forced to dig their own grave. Think, dear son, how they suffered during those minutes. They begged the Germans to free them but the brutes would not listen to them. You can imagine, my dear son, what a blow it has been for your mother to hear that the blood of her two defenceless children has been shed without their even having known the joy of being soldiers.

I do not reproduce this document for the facts which it relates. We have all read, almost everywhere, such atrocious stories. Nor do I quote it for the sentiments expressed. It matters little that she belongs to the humblest class. As a French woman, a mother, her feelings are the same as those of any woman. The point I make is that her pen found the right words to picture

what she felt, to express the horror and the pity mingling in her soul.

To free the people from their habitual grooves of thought it is necessary to give them new models, but what is of chief importance is to show them their inner selves. Almost never do they pause to contemplate themselves in life. Their sentiments, their thoughts, their actions are ordered by tradition, example, and habit. They develop unconsciously with the passing days. When it becomes necessary to speak or write, having no knowledge of their own resources, they are helpless and fall back on stereotyped phrases.

They say to you: "Fine weather today." They write: "I hope this letter will find you the same." But teach them other words and you will see that they know how to use them, and if tragic events happen which force them to introspection, you will find that they are capable of observing, of thinking, and of writing letters which will bring the tears to your eyes.

Since the second of August events after events of tragic importance have repeated themselves unceasingly. Millions of men

in all the dugouts at the front are scribbling on sheets of paper: millions of women in all the homes of France are filling page after page. Each of them relates what he sees, describes his thoughts, and lets his heart overflow.

These letters from the multitude are beautiful. I delight in them and I believe that they are beneficial, which is even better. They reveal both to those who receive them and those who write them things which are never expressed in conversation. The lips, which at all hours of the day carelessly open to pour forth jokes or slang, would tremble before certain words which come from the bottom of the soul. Our "types" would recount horrors without wincing, but would blush to show the concealed beauty of their spirit. The prudishness of the soldier no more resembles that of the young girl than night resembles day; yet it exists and would conceal treasures from us if it were not for the letters. When our men write they feel as if they were whispering and that gives them courage.

Many women have discovered in this manner since the war how much their old

companions in misery still cherish them: husbands have had the revelation of the fervent and attentive love of their wives. They lived side by side, without speaking the words the heart needs: now they write them.

Couples, separated for many months, are more united than ever. Not all of them. For in the great crisis nothing remains mediocre, neither vice nor virtue. And, while the happy unions become closer, the unhappy ones insensibly fall farther apart. We are living in a period of low debauchery on the one side and of high exaltation of the homely virtues on the other.

The women of France—like Roxane in "Cyrano de Bergerac"—decipher with surprise the wonderful notes which arrive from the front. They think: "He has never spoken to me like that before." It is an enchantment. Those whom the wives gravely address as "My dear husband" also marvel. Their eyes are open to a new life, soft and sentimental, whose existence they had not previously suspected. As they have leisure in the trench, they dream, after each mail, of the great joy of being loved.

When the women of France think of their absent ones they express themselves in

phrases which belong to eternity. One of them learns that her husband has had to leave the front for the hospital, with bronchitis. A comrade of her "man" has written her, taking pains to break the news gently. She answers:

MONSIEUR:

I received your letter two days ago. It caused me a very great emotion. My poor Charles is perhaps very ill and he will not want to tell me. I have not yet received word from him. He must stay in the hospital for a good month; then he can go to the depot and come and join me later, and I can render him the gentle care which he will desire. He must have grown much thinner, poor friend. Let us hope that God will listen to my prayer.

I do not see anything more to add to-day. My little girl joins with me in thanking you and in saying: good luck!

(Signed) *Une dame française*, who wishes you much happiness and hopes to have the opportunity some day of meeting her husband's good comrade.

She will render him the "gentle care which he will desire." What a pretty sentence! How could I have said that the simple people repeat only ready-made phrases. Here is a new one with a deep meaning. One renders what one owes: one renders devotion to God and honours to a sovereign

and, this woman assures us, gentle care to one's husband. Madame de Sévigné could not have said it better.

She signs herself "a *dame* of France." We usually smile when a person who wishes to appear cultivated introduces his wife as "*dame*" and his daughter as "*demoiselle*," whereas we merely introduce them as our wives and our daughters. I did not smile this time. Here at the front we are stopped at almost every cross-road by the sharp challenge of the guard: "*Qui vive?*" We like to answer in a clear voice: "France." This woman does the same. I salute her for having ended her letter with such a serious note, ennobled by the naïve way in which she uses it.

Dear French women, write to us often! Your letters bring your presence to us. They say that the war has separated the men and the women, and yet the union of their hearts has never been closer. Our mothers, our wives, our sisters people our dreams, and this is the country of endless dreams. You reign over us in our trenches and in our dugouts. You come even into our quarrels and you stop them with a pretty gesture.

We once played a low trick on one of our first sergeants which he would never have forgiven if it had not been for a woman's letter. In October, 1914, a cow strayed into the field separating the German line from ours. It was coveted in both camps, both for its milk and its meat. One fine morning there was no more cow. We thought the Boches had succeeded in capturing it. Six months later we advanced our lines. In a ravine, just midway between the enemy's trenches and our own, our men discovered a black mass. The beet-stalks were high and it was difficult to make it out, but the wind turned and carried toward us an awful odour. It was the dead cow, and not more than fifty yards away from the old German line. Our men swore against those dirty people who hadn't the courage to get rid of such a neighbour. Two days later we received the order to bury the animal, but during the intervening forty-eight hours we had much merriment.

The sergeant-major shut himself up during the morning of the first day. He had a large wooden sign post, which the company had received for the purpose of marking the name of a *boyau*, and on it

he was writing mysterious characters. When we asked questions he rolled his eyes like a conspirator and confided to us with a finger on his lips:

"It is about the cow; you will see. Not a word to Julien."

Here we designate our great friends by their Christian names. Julien was the first sergeant and a great comrade of the sergeant-major.

After nightfall the latter disappeared with the placard under his arm. He came back without it, rubbing his hands together, laughing from ear to ear. He said:

"The placard is on the cow, there will be some fun to-morrow."

The next day, in fact, more than fulfilled his expectations. The first sergeant came running to our post, saluted the officer in command of the company, and said:

"My Lieutenant, I must tell you myself that the Boches came up as far as the cow during the night, and planted a placard."

"A placard?"

"Yes, my Lieutenant, on the dead cow."

He seemed indignant. He offered to go himself at night and take away the placard. We protected with hypocritical gestures.

"It is dangerous, my friend."

"Dangerous as much as you like! We must see what they have written and answer them."

"Yes, but not you. Send a *bonhomme*. It is not the duty of the chief sergeant. That cow has a nasty smell."

"My Lieutenant, it stinks——"

"Then leave it."

As he stood hesitating, I cunningly added:

"Besides, you might get killed."

He is brave; that made him sit up.

"I am not afraid."

Immediately his decision was made. At dusk he went out to the listening post and climbed up on the plain. He crawled under the netting of barbed wire, which was much less of an obstacle at that time than now, and advanced toward the animal.

Have I told you that Julien is a butcher by trade? On the placard the sergeant-major had written these cruel words.

MEAT MARKET
JULIEN S——, Proprietor
FIRST QUALITY MEATS
3 francs the kilog.

I omit the surname here but it was written to the last letter on the sign. Arriving near the cow, the deluded fellow pinched his nose, put out his hand, and got hold of the placard. While the Boches who had heard him were firing in all directions, he came back toward us hugging the board to his heart.

He became very angry when he found that he had been made the subject of this joke. We were much to be blamed for we were the ones who had induced him to go after the sign, but he turned his anger against the sergeant-major.

He began to look for the latter, having made up his mind, he told us, to give him a lesson. He had a violent temper and powerful fists, a combination which did not make us at all happy.

But they were both married and received letters from their wives every day which they read side by side. In those letters one sentence often recurred: "I am glad you have such a good friend in the trenches." That evening as the first sergeant entered the sergeant-major's dugout to carry out his threat, the man on duty handed them both their accustomed letters.



They forgot all the rest, sat down immediately, and began to read. We arrived full of anxiety as to a possible tragedy and ready to interpose ourselves if necessary. We found them reading, but amidst a heavy silence which might be the forerunner of a storm. They had four long pages each to read. The first sergeant finally folded his letter and glanced sidewise at the sergeant-major. The quartermaster whispered in my ear:

"It is going to be terrible."

We held our breath. The sergeant-major also finished and turned slowly toward his friend. In an humble voice, full of affectionate anxiety, he asked:

"Good news?"

"Yes," tersely replied the other.

"Just think," continued the sergeant with emotion, "my wife has sent me my little girl's last book of writing exercises."

At that the first sergeant changed colour, looked at his adversary with envious eyes, and hitting the table with his fist, exclaimed:

"That is perfectly wonderful! Show it to me."



XIII

Honour

I NEVER punish my men," said an officer. "I am always severe with them," said another, "the only way to control them is to threaten them with prison."

They are both wrong, but in particular the second. At the front punishment must be administered only with great care. We live among the men and therefore possess a thousand means of influencing them. A chief who punishes too often thereby confesses his own helplessness.

It is necessary to be severe sometimes; it is not a matter of choice but of conscience. One cannot say "I never punish"; but one can say: "I would like never to punish."

A man, in my company, of rather gloomy disposition had developed the habit of always going off by himself on the last day of each period of rest and drinking

heavily in some out-of-the-way inn. His family of five children lived in the invaded regions and he therefore could receive no news from them. Whenever the time came to go back to the trenches he would go off and drown his sorrows in this manner.

One can afford a little leniency at times with the men who get drunk in cantonment. But one can never excuse their absence from roll-call when the time has come to return to the front and resume their fighting places.

One evening this man, although missing from the ranks, was, by some complicity on the part of his comrades, reported as present. The company departed for the trenches without him and proceeded to relieve the troops we found there. Almost at once his squad was assigned, not for guard duty, but to do some hard fatigue work. Absent, he evaded it. His comrades knew it, but not his chiefs.

It was very dark and I was walking through the *boyaux* an hour later when I met a man who apparently was coming from the rear.

"Good evening, old man!"

"Good evening, sir."

Was it fate that made me turn and call to this man after he had passed me?

"Eh! Say over there!"

"Yes, sir."

"Who are you?"

"It is only me, my Lieutenant."

They always answer like that at night. It is not very illuminating. I insisted.

"Tell me your name."

He gave me his name then, but his conscience not being very clear he began to make stumbling excuses.

"I am a little late but I did not know the hour for assembly."

He had given himself away. His fault was without excuse and I gave him four days of prison.

You can readily conceive that here we do not confine the men in cells. Punishment consists first of humiliation. It is announced to his comrades in the *Bulletin;* it is written down in the man's military record; it will remain always as an indelible stain. But as some natures do not mind that kind of punishment, the high command has also ordered that the men serve their prison sentence by staying in the trenches when their comrades go back to the cantonment.

So when we went to rest six days later, my man remained in the first line. He saw us go with considerable sadness. I also felt sorrow at leaving him there, but it was just.

The next day a grenade killed him.

Five orphans because I punished that man! I shiver to think of the distress of my soul if my conscience had not been so clear and secure. I felt that my action could withstand even my own criticism and that I could pray above that grave without remorse.

People came from right and left and said needless words to comfort me.

"It was written," said one.

"You could not imagine that this would happen," said another. These words shocked me. I knew only too well that this tragedy had been brought about by my action, but I also felt that no one else had the right to declare me innocent. It was my conscience alone which could absolve me.

It had done so. Yet I could not help thinking of the many acts we perform here without consideration of the ultimate consequences they may entail. If we punish in a moment of anger, or for revenge, or in order to shift a compromising

responsibility from our own shoulders to those of some poor man, we totally ignore how far-reaching our fault may be. It may even become a crime without our being able to foresee it. At the war we are the masters of nothing but our conscience. Unhappy be they who do not guard theirs severely. The soldier's virtue must be above that of other men. It bears the beautiful name of Honour!

Let us to-night meditate on honour. To define the meaning of this great word let us take a very simple example in the every-day life of the armies at the front.

For some time, at stated intervals, we have been given leave of absence of six days to spend with our families. This *permission* does not begin to count until the arrival at the station at one's destination, and is cancelled at the same place, exactly the six days later. The time wasted in slow trains or in round-about itineraries is not included. The men on leave have to take the military trains and are frequently gone for more than two weeks before getting back to the trenches. The officers are allowed to travel separately on the express trains and thus are able to return much sooner.

No one can keep track of the train schedules or determine whether in a given case the time limit has been exceeded.

There are three types of officers. The cautious ones are those who stay only four days with their family and arrive back at the front on the sixth day. The sly ones take nine days at home and when asked for an explanation, invent long stories about time tables and trains which confuse even the most intelligent of colonels. The third type is best represented by one of my friends. He stays the full, six times twenty-four hours, but travels both ways, going and coming, by the fastest trains. He satisfies in this manner, not only his sentimental obligations to his mother and family, but also his sacred duties toward his chief. I admire him.

I know another who has a high conception of his duty. He voluntarily left his wife and numerous small children to join the army. Yet he does not hesitate to cheat a little by overstaying his leave at home, and to thank the time tables for their vagueness. Although this little irregularity does not prevent him from being brave and anxious to serve well, the friend who is

punctilious about his obligations is of greater worth. He is a man of honour.

The difference between these two men depends upon a difference in their impulses. One responds only to the great duties, the less-important ones he does not see. He is impressed by the former in the same way that an artist is impressed by the great spectacles of Nature. He owes this liking for great ennobling obligations, doubtless as much to his education as to the primary qualities of his soul. But he remains a sinner destined for every weakness. He follows the right things for the love of them, and love is inconsistent.

The other perhaps less brilliant will never fall. A man of honour is one who jealously verifies all his actions himself. He knows only one judge and that is an implacable one: His conscience. It rules him like a tyrant. He is, in his own fashion, an individualist, a man who is controlled by himself alone. We hear of conscientious citizens: there is an example of what they ought to be.

I think that we can offer this new cult of honour to our own recently disillusioned individualists who wished to free

the human soul but were betrayed by Liberty, to their own undoing. They wanted the free man to be the sovereign judge of right and wrong and to make his own laws. They erred because sovereignty is not the property of the individual but of human laws which are superior to us. They are not an expression of our will nor even of the general will; they spring from the nature of things and beings in spite of us. We do not dominate them; they dominate us. My reason has the power to search out and formulate these laws but not to make them. It can make mistakes in this research, but I do not call that a prerogative, it is an infirmity.

Thus the wise man does not forge laws to suit himself, he adheres to the true ones. And when the devotion that he renders them is so fervent that his soul becomes jealous of his ability to recognize and obey them, this jealousy is called Honour.

I am willing to become an individualist of that kind myself. Each man can entertain, at the bottom of his soul, a divine flame which shines for him alone and whose warmth he secretly enjoys. A virtuous being is one whose actions are straight-

forward. The man of honour cultivates straight dealing, not only in his acts, but even in his inmost thoughts and for his own particular satisfaction. His virtue is not higher but more certain. Proud and egotistical, Honour looks for its reward and finds it only in itself. In trying to exalt the supremacy of the individual we only succeeded in creating generations of destroyers. Let us create men of honour, and the individual, having become as noble as a God, will then deserve his own admiration.

Military Honour consists in doing one's soldierly duty even until death. In that sense honour is a customary attribute of the French people. I do not know one comrade, one man around me, who would not be ready at any tragic hour to give his blood immediately for the Motherland.

But all are not equally apt at the little daily heroisms of which honour is woven. The young officer who threw himself first into the enemy's trench has fully merited his cross. He is a brave man. And this timid soldier whom I always meet in front of the parapet merely watching the enemy will not win a reward. It is logical that human honours go to the one who has

rendered a signal service. The other one, however, has his share of merit and it is not the least.

He has the joy of his conscience: a pleasure of rare quality. Or at least those who know how to rejoice in it are rare. The man I am thinking of has aroused my constant admiration. Always at his post, willing, obliging to his comrades, dignified before his chiefs, without shame dropping his rifle for the shovel, working well, fighting well, eating and sleeping well: a perfect soldier. He knows but one law—his duty; but one judge—his conscience. He is an upright man. We have spoken much of our democratic pride, so low, so shabby. It consists in refusing to accept any order or any restraint. The enemy of all superiority, it detests all that is noble and delights in a stupid equality. True pride resembles it but little. It is the pride of the independent soul and the enemy of degrading yokes. It undertakes with tenacity and pride all duties, the obscure ones as well as the brilliant ones.

After the war those who will have survived the wild struggles for which we have been preparing ourselves during the last

year of war will become the apostles of honour. Here we have seen too clearly the superiority of those possessing severe and jealous consciences not to have understood that the greatness of man lies entirely in the strength of his soul.

Doubtless the French will organize themselves as the Germans have done. But they will never become vile slaves—for each man, free, strong, and brave, will put his pride in censuring himself. It is natural that Honour should once more become a national virtue in the country of so many struggles for independent ideas.

XIV

The Motherland

HERE is a man on guard in the trenches. He is watching vigilantly and his expression is one of hatred as he holds his eyes fixed on the enemy line. I approach him and tap his shoulder.

"What are you doing there?"

"I am on watch, my Lieutenant."

"But what else?"

"I keep my eye on the Boches."

"And what is behind your back?"

"Our sleeping comrades."

"Yes, but behind them?"

"The beet fields."

"And farther behind?"

"Well, I don't know."

I looked into his eyes; they are empty of thought. The good man would very much like to make a suitable reply, but where is he to find it? Let us help him.

"Why, thoughtless fellow, there is France."

"It is true, I hadn't thought of that."

Why should he think of it? Ever since childhood he has heard nothing but that all men are brothers, that frontiers no longer exist and that the idea of a Motherland is a wicked invention of tyrants and capitalists. Patriotism survived only in the soil and in tradition. The French are linked together at present by virtue of the war; the common trial. But to know and love France, the Motherland, one must have either lived close to her soil or studied her history. This man works and lives in the city; he has not had the opportunity to develop a deep attachment for a field, or a meadow, or an old familiar brook. The books which have been given him to read have only taught him errors.

If I put the same question to a peasant he will be no whit more eloquent. The little motherlands which each village used to constitute have been at least spoiled, if not entirely destroyed. The mere fact of having spent one's days, happy or dreary alike, on a certain patch of land is not alone sufficient to make one recognize in it the

Motherland. The ground must also have been peopled with the images of the dead ancestors who have formerly owned it one after the other; who have done the same things at the same seasons—sung and danced on big feast days, prayed in the same church still standing, and lived the same simple life, rich in remembrances and promise—as the present owner. The peasant who keeps these traditions is bound to be patriotic, if not to his thirty-nine millions of living brothers, at least to his fathers. He will love France, if not for its present strength and size, at least for its past. Not being educated, but knowing more the history of his country that its geography, he will be capable of dying on the battlefield, and of telling you why he is willing to make that sacrifice.

Formerly in the countryside there were additional influences at work to broaden the views of the agriculturists and to show them the glory of their Motherland. The grandmothers told stories of heroes; the priest gathered his parishioners around him to sing "*Te Deums*" in honour of the king's victories; the lord of the Manor and his followers, when they came back

from national wars, brought the echoes with them. Thus, Joan of Arc when but a child, was able to conceive the idea of France, the nation, although living in the little out-of-the-way village of Domrémy, yet in those days, with no telegraph, next to no post, no railways, and practically no roads, France was a far more distant empire to this peasant girl than the whole universe to a man of the twentieth century.

To-day our natal soil has lost much of its virtue. The songs of long ago are forgotten and peasant and shepherdess repeat only the refrains of the music halls. They no longer go to church. The old women are silent and no longer recognize in their city-bred children the reflection of their own image. Instead of revering the dead this new generation looks down on them from a lofty height with pity for their ignorance. The young men dance nothing but the waltz, the cake-walk, and the Argentine tango.

I am wrong. Four of our men from the neighbourhood of Saint-Flour still know the "*bourrée**. They often dance, or rather "jump" it for our entertainment at the

*French peasant dance from the province of Auvergne.

cantonment. We never tire of watching the mincing manners of these bearded mountaineers. They pound their muddy feet on the ground, bow to their partners, seize them by the waist, back, and whirl, all with the same happy smile and to the plaintive music of an accordion. These four men have brought the whole of their old Auvergne country among us with their dance.

Only a certain provincial patriotism has survived among the people from the rural districts. It is narrow and exclusive but, nevertheless, it does not offend me. Since the beginning of the war our soldiers have wandered everywhere. Men mobilized from the farming regions of the North, who were sent through the "Vienne" valley, so beautiful between Limoges and Angoulême, could scarcely hide their contempt for ground where only grass and trees are able to grow.

"Don't they have any wheat around here?" they asked.

The men from the centre of France, accustomed to the fresh valleys, pretty meadows, and groves of chestnut trees, were amazed at seeing the rich but monotonous plains of Picardy and Artois.

To fortify and strengthen the frail love that each of these men bears to his own corner of the earth it would have been enough to teach them the grandeur of the common Motherland.

The war is a splendid opportunity for doing this very thing. Instead the newspapers tell them that they are fighting for the civilization and liberty of the world. Nobody among the popular writers thinks of singing the praises of our Motherland, or claiming that it is for her sake that all this fine blood is being shed.

They read, just as I do, sentences of this kind in the morning newspapers: "We are not fighting for ourselves, it is for the world and the future. What are a few months of war in comparison with the fifty or a hundred years of prosperity and peace which we are preparing? Let our arms triumph and the whole earth will be at rest."

Thus it is not for our own sakes that we are fighting, and the blood which we have shed, the ruined villages, the horrible suffering, the devastation, and the mourning in France are for the happiness of the human race! Some misguided French people dare

to write, although they do not even know how to think. They do not realize that they have a Motherland. They see only vague forms in the clouds, when right in front of their eyes is living the most animated, saintly, and tragic of figures; this France, the inheritance of a hundred generations of ancestors; where we have been born, where we draw our breath and which we will leave to our sons, as sweet as she was when we first looked on her.

There are a few of us who do not wish any one to alter our language, our old customs, our cherished habits, our soil, our houses. We have good qualities and faults: let us keep them! The Germans may cultivate their virtues and their vices at home but they must not overflow on us. To each man his Motherland. We are fighting for ours.

No doubt this atrocious war will still be long and always more cruel. What shall we do when it is finished? The dreamers say that peace will bring universal disarmament. I, who dream of my hearthside and of my children, do not speak in this manner. After the war I hope that we will surround France with such safeguards as

will protect her for all time. We will not be the only ones to profit by the victory. Both in a business sense and in self-development, other nations, perhaps more than ours, will find themselves the gainers by the peace which they will have helped to purchase so dearly. Owing to a fatal law, strong peoples in both hemispheres may become a menace to their less-vigorous neighbours. God keep us then from being among the worn-out nations!

The war over, we shall be condemned to continue the cultivation of our muscles. We are going to win in spite of our great weakness which might have cost us defeat. May the victory restore to us the liking for physical strength. I am unable to think of the whole of humanity, but of France alone, while French blood is flowing. I am not tempted to betray our dead, nor to ruin the cause for which they are dying by thousands. They fall to save the Motherland. If I survive the slaughter yet to come, I will consecrate all the days that God will give me to the safeguarding of this sacred Motherland. After that is done, if I have five minutes to spare, I will busy myself with the human race.

Our soldiers are wholeheartedly striving to perform the new duty which has confronted them. They hold their posts, some of them without comprehending, the others only half understanding. An interior force upholds them, just as faith proves the existence of God. Their patriotic instinct renders to the sovereignty of their race a touching homage.

These simple men, who hardly know why they are here, and those dupes who are fighting only for empty words, give way to the ascendency of a third class of French people: those who know and love the Motherland.

For there are some men who have neither fallen into ignorance nor fatal errors. While the demagogues preached the social war they prepared their souls in silence for the national war. The men in power busied themselves with the happiness of humanity: they were thinking of French prosperity. The army was being disorganized: they regarded it as a defense of last resort. These men of deep wisdom seldom appeared in public: they lived in their homes. The family is the first Motherland. Who loves one serves the other.

We have in France quantities of noble families, poor and rich alike, who have given their best blood to the country. From them came the group of splendid youths who, at the first call, hurried to form the front line; thus the best went toward death with exaltation to save the others.

Each time I search for a typical French family, my thoughts obstinately revert to certain homes at Lille where my childhood days were spent. How many young men in the spring of robust youth are gone, never more to animate the streets and the houses of my old city? Behind that curtain of frail trees which shuts off our horizon in the rear of the enemy's trenches lies a rich and noble part of France, where crying widows and mothers still wait for those who will never come back.

It was there that I learned to know my Motherland. I am not from Lille by birth, but all the first years of my studies were spent there and I have made precious friendships in that city. My country is not the French Flanders where I have lived, nor the Ile-de-France where I was born. I belong to the whole of France, but it was at Lille that I first learned it. Because I

grew up with all my comrades in the midst of fervent national traditions, I have neither difficulty nor merit in serving to-day. I wish the same ardent devotion could be put in every French soul. One does not fight better, but with more love.

My love for the Motherland increased the day I learned that the enemy had profaned Lille with his presence. It horrifies me to-day to think that the Prussians are patrolling in the streets where I walked when I was a child. They camp in the *Citadelle* where I began my classes and won my first military honours. Germans are now sleeping in the barracks where I enjoyed my wonderful youthful slumbers. Will a rifle wake them up to-morrow? What will the echoes of the Bois de la Deûle say—or those of the Bois de Boulogne? Let the booted Hessians strike their heels on the hard pavements of Lille; that land can never belong to them.

My watchman, the one who keeps his eyes on the Boches with an expression of anger, does not think of so many things. Yet he is brave and would make a good patriot if he had only been taught how. Some day I will go and sit with him in a

corner of the trench and I will teach him gently how to cherish France.

What models will I place before him? I will choose from among those whom the war has already taken from us. The young poet Gauthier Ferrières died a few days ago at the Dardanelles. Is it possible that the image of a poet can influence this uncultured man? Why not? It is a time for war songs and for magnificent dreams. I was greatly attached to Ferrières, who was a delightful man and a fervent patriot. On some things we thought and reasoned differently, but as soon as it was a question of France, we were agreed. He admired all our great men with a very personal, a very ardent, and a very jealous love. He was at one time furiously angry with Jules Lemaître because he had criticized Châteaubriand. He would not permit anyone to speak of Racine except to glorify him. He knew familiarly all the campaigns of the Emperor and liked to talk about them. I shall always remember the expression of his face when, in my study, he would recite to me the speeches of his hero. He spoke with the same pride of the *Roi Soleil* and knew the merits of the treaties of



Westphalia as thoroughly as any of the contemporary historians. Love gave to this dreamer the foresight of a prophet as soon as France was in question. Alas! He was mistaken only in thinking that he would be with us when we again entered Alsace

> Oui, quand s'éteindront les fournaises,
> Après les glorieux combats.
> C'est avec les couleurs françaises
> Que nous retournerons là-bas.
>
> Alors du Rhin jusqu' à la Meurthe
> On pourra rire et rire encore*. . . , .

The bursting of a Turkish shell decreed that this handsome son of France shall never march on the road to Strassburg and sing his joy in song. However, by grace of Heaven, he died a hero, in an historic land, on one of those Oriental shores whose colours and antique glory always enchanted his Muse.

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*"When after glorious combats,
The fires are at last extinguished,
With the French colours flying
We will return to Alsace

"Then, from the Rhine to the Meurthe,
Smiles and laughter will reign"



Let us fashion our souls after his. We must be ourselves jealous lovers of the Motherland, in order to instruct those ignorant people who either have forgotten the name of their country, or who render their devotion only to high-sounding, humanitarian words. We need not blush if our passion is exclusively for her; we are in good company. The enemy himself teaches us that lesson.

To give material for our own meditations and an object lesson for conversation with the men, we have been handed the text of a long letter found on a prisoner. I remember a striking passage from it. The German was trying to prove to his correspondent that his country, not being able to do better, will at least arrive at an honourable peace—a white peace.

He goes on in substance:

On what do I found this conviction? First of all, on our patriotism, on our sense of discipline, on our genius for organization and, above all, on the incapacity for organization of our adversaries.

Ah! If they could unite their resources with our qualities of method and of initiative, we should certainly be lost. I shiver at the thought of what we would do in their place, of what would menace

us if they knew how to utilize their power. Our backs would be broken!

In order to break their backs, as he calls it, it is only necessary to do certain things: discipline our forces, but above all learn to know our enemy. If we knew our power we would not allow it to be wasted.

Let us terminate these pages by together looking at our country with loving eyes: it is a good pastime in the trenches.

It is five o'clock, my comrades are playing bridge at the bottom of a cave, and I am reading beside them. The line has been calm this afternoon and there has been neither bombardment nor shooting on either side. Suddenly there comes a fusillade which brings us out of our dugout. The German bullets clip the parapet with a wailing sound. Our rifles crackle in return. What is going on? Some of the men lift their heads and with a grimace look at the sky. Up there an enemy airplane is flying above our trenches. All eyes and weapons are fixed on it. The watchmen opposite are firing at our earthworks in order to divert our attention and take our shots away from their comrade. Much noise and stirring about, all for a nasty bird of prey which

one can scarcely distinguish in the sky and whose buzz is so distant that it sounds like a mosquito. Now the artillery begins to roar.

The shells ascend with a shrill whistle and burst about the *Taube* in a number of tiny white clouds like tampons of cotton wool.

"Too short!"

"He can get past!"

"He won't get past!"

The German proceeds cautiously, the centre of noise and shrapnel. An exciting chase, but it is seldom that the object of these menaces and imprecations is hit. However, it is possible to bar his route with more or less success and when he is turned back a point is scored on our side.

These aërial dramas take place usually in the early morning hours or just before our evening meal. We have seen the Germans waste more than two hundred shells in a few minutes on some of our airplanes. Our hearts beat fast when one of our daring pilots goes straight for their lines and disappears into the horizon. They storm at him with their machine guns and heavy artillery and we laugh with joy when we think of those Frenchmen looking down at them and snap-

ping their fingers while they empty their munition box.

And it is an invention of ours, this marvellous little thing at sight of which our souls grow humble with admiration. It is now nearly a year that we have been breaking our necks in trying to follow the course of the same miracle through the air and yet we have not grown weary. At first the enemy airplanes provoked us. They seemed to have usurped one of our own particular glories in planing above our heads. We know now that we are still the masters of the air. They have numerous and well-made machines and a wonderful organization; as they are always quick to adapt and perfect the ideas of others. The genius remains with us.

At Hébuterne a French pilot took part in the attack on the enemy trenches. He came down to within fifty yards of the earth, spitting fire into the *boyaux* with his machine gun, flew up and plunged once more, sowing death among our enemy and intoxicating our men with enthusiasm. Patriotism has been lulled to sleep by the words of the humanitarian philosophers. That day I saw it suddenly flame in the eyes

of the men just as the blood rises up under the skin in moments of great emotion. When, following one of these aërial battles, our old soldiers, their muscles stiff but their souls exalted, let their eyes fall to the sad earth of the trenches, they regard each other silently, but what a light glows from behind their dusty lashes. It is the joy of being French that shines in them; at that instant it would be easy with a few well-chosen words to move them to tears. They go back to their shelters with their slow, accustomed tread, but that night they sleep with peace in their hearts and the kiss of France upon their foreheads.

The Germans say they are masters in the art of war. Yet they are, in reality, as much our pupils in this domain as they are in most others. Their chemists, whose praises all are singing, have invented neither the smokeless powder nor the *mélinite*. Those redoubtable rifles and high-velocity projectiles which have revolutionized the methods of fighting were possessed by us before they were by them. Their Emperor as he went to war said with pride:

"I shall be victorious because I have my cannon."

We also have ours, that wonderful 75 which has been the admiration of all the soldiers of the world. This terrible weapon can never be praised too much. The enemy's heavy artillery found us unprepared at the beginning, but it was French foresight, not French genius, which was then at fault. It would be easy to point to the victories of our great past in the same way that the present Greeks content themselves with the ancient victories of Salamus and Marathon. Thank goodness we have more recent proofs of the strategic soundness of French brains; the lieutenants of William II found their master on the Marne and on the Yser.

It is the same upon the sea, no matter what one may think. If it be true that the English, when they attack, massacre the enemy and refuse him quarter, crying "Lusitania! Lusitania!" I confess I find no strength to blame them, for the Germans are pirates. At one time the world had a right to tremble before the prowess of the German flotillas; we might fear that the powerful fleets of England and her allies would be forced to relinquish the mastery of the seas to the small underwater boats.

Experience has shown that in spite of the sting of an insect which pricks here and there and downs a few lions, the laws of Nature do not change: the lion remains king. Just the same we must admire those wonderful instruments which French genius has invented. If someone tells you to see in them the evidence of German ingenuity, then remember our Goubet, dying in poverty after having invented the first submarine, and our Gustave Zédé, builder of the first submersible.

"Then have we created for the benefit of others?"

"Perhaps."

"And plucked the chestnuts out of the fire?"

"Doubtless."

"It is a proof, one more proof, that we are not well organized. Who denies it?"

But that also proves that we can love, cherish, and venerate with pride and devotion our Motherland as the most beautiful sovereign. Let us love and serve her not with words but with acts. We have talked much during the last fifty years: the reign of eloquence is over. A patient, courageous, persevering effort will restore

to us the place which we ought to occupy at the head of the nations. Babblers, dreamers—let us rather call them by their true name, traitors to their country—had promised to the people a lazy existence, free from suffering, disappointment, and conflicts. It is important for France to understand at this time when all her sons are facing death, once and for all, the treachery of these promises. This nation is now strong and wise enough to listen to the truth.

Let us teach our children to taste the life-giving flavour of accomplished duty. Let us savour it ourselves. Let us understand that peace will not be eternal. It is possible that the various peoples of the universe will extend to us their friendship after the victory. Let us hope for it without discounting it. It is not enough to be loved for the arts in which we excel and praised for our good name and the bravery of our armies. When the larger task is accomplished let us not hesitate before the more humble, but equally beautiful, effort of hard and monotonous daily labour. French intelligence and French strength have once more found proof of their existence

and of their worth. It had been denied that we still remained what we once were. We now know, in company with the entire world, that the blood of our fathers, the kings of Europe and of the world by virtue of their manly qualities and genius, still runs in our veins. We must not content our pride with this alone, but let us resolve to demonstrate the same valiantness in peace as we have shown in war. On that condition alone will we give back to France and to ourselves that liberty so madly invoked in the last century and yet always betrayed.

Thus French glory can illuminate the world if we only wish it. We must entertain this thought in our hearts and proclaim it all about us. It is our only true comfort at such a time as this and, if we wish to avoid falling back into our former errors after the war, it must be our chief reliance.

Why are we fighting? Solely to retain mastery of our own genius, to draw from it noble joys and just profits when we have once more become wise.

December, 1914—August, 1915

THE END



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